

DAME THIN-PIN

AND OTHER STORIES

Helen Margaret Dixon



Illustrated by

KATE MARION RATHBONE

AND OTHERS

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The Giantess +++ threw out her arm to clutch at Phillida.

DAME THIN-PIN

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

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'CROSSPATCH MARIETTA,' 'THE COUNTESS RINCKLESPYN'

ILLUSTRATED

BY

KATE MARION RATHBONE

AND OTHERS

BIRMINGHAM

CORNISH BROTHERS LTD

1909

WRITTEN FOR

LETTICE

CECILY

RACHEL

CATHERINE

LALLIE

BARBARA

JANET

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DAME THIN-PIN

THERE was once a merchant who was very rich. He had only one child, who was called Phillida. He had lost his wife—from a fever caught whilst visiting at a friend's house—when Phillida was still a baby ; so, fearing that he might in the same way lose his little girl if he let her go about as other children did, he built a large house in the middle of an immense park, and settled down to live there with her for the rest of his life, and spent his time in trying to protect her from every ill. He kept a large number of servants, carefully chosen, and Phillida was waited on hand and foot, and allowed to do nothing for herself. If she tried to run, two maids ran with her—one on each side—to prevent her from falling ; all her toys were soft and round so that she should not hurt herself with them in any way ; the edges of all the furniture were padded, and everything was scrubbed and scoured and disinfected every day to keep every harmful speck of dust away from her.

She was never allowed to go beyond the garden

except when she drove in the park with her father, and even then he did not take her near enough to the outer walls for her to be able to see beyond them. No child was ever allowed to come near her, and she was kept entirely ignorant of even the most everyday things and happenings outside her own home life.

Therefore when a sad time came, when the merchant's affairs went wrong, and his money was all lost, and he himself died of grief and worry, Phillida was left quite alone, without friends or money, and without the vaguest notion how to take care of herself or to earn her own living.

When the last of the many servants had left the house after the great sale, and the last load of furniture had been driven slowly off, Phillida wandered aimlessly down the avenue, not knowing what to do next, or where to look for a supper and a bed for the night.

She passed through the lodge gate for the first time in her life, and walked on down the road to the village.

'What tiny little houses,' she thought, 'I won't go into any of those,' and she went on till she came to a great wrought-iron gate set in a very high wall. Through this gate she could see a huge castle, far bigger than her old home had been.

'This is better,' she said; 'there will be plenty of room here for me. I only want two or three rooms. I'll go in and tell them I've come to stay.'

Some village children, who had followed her up the road, called to her—

‘Dame Thin-as-a-pin, the Giantess, lives there. Don’t go in, *don’t* go in!’

But Phillida took no notice of the children, and through the gate she went and knocked at the great door; and not receiving an answer at once, she raised the heavy knocker again, and let it fall, making noise enough to rouse the whole village.

Then the door slowly opened a little way, and she pushed herself through the narrow space into a hall, which was so enormous that the rafters in the roof were quite dim and indistinct in the far distance.

Phillida was much interested in looking about her, and wandered round the hall till she came to a great staircase. She was just wondering how long it would take her to get to the top, when she heard a voice—a long way above her—like the sound of a knife cutting through a cork; and, looking up, saw the figure of a woman—wearing a huge white mob-cap and a shawl—so thin and so tall that Phillida was quite startled, and set off running across the hall, back to the door.

‘You can’t get out now you are once in,’ snapped the voice. ‘Here you’ll stay till I have done with you. Nice and plump—won’t need much to eat—she’ll do,’ she added to herself, and with three steps she caught up Phillida before she reached the door, and clutched at her arm.

‘Oh! oh!’ screamed Phillida, ‘let me go! you hurt me; you’re so thin, your bones prick.’

Then she remembered what the children had said at the gate—

‘Dame Thin-as-a-pin, the Giantess, lives there. Don’t go in, *don’t* go in.’

But now she *was* in, and evidently couldn’t get out, so she determined to make the best of it, and throwing her head back, she shouted up at the Giantess—

‘I’ve come to stay here, as my father is dead and my home has been sold. I shall only want two rooms and one maid. I should like dinner now, please, in my sitting-room. I’m very hungry.’

‘Rooms? dinner? and a maid? what else, I wonder?’ said the Giantess in her thin, knife-like voice. ‘I don’t take in visitors, and there’s no maid here but you. I’ve just settled to engage you, and you’ll have to cook and clean and wait on me’; and taking Phillida’s long hair up in her fingers, she dragged her after her along the hall and through a door into the kitchen, which was furnished with an ordinary-sized table, one chair, and some cooking utensils. The walls were whitewashed roughly, with here and there a nail knocked in for a kettle or brush to hang from, and three or four shelves to hold saucepans, etc., were fixed irregularly, and not very conveniently, about four or five feet from the floor. And near the fireplace, on one side of the kitchen only, ran a plain wooden wainscot about eighteen inches high.

‘Now cook,’ ordered the Giantess as she stalked through the door again and shut and bolted it behind her.

‘Cook?’ exclaimed Phillida aloud, as soon as she recovered her breath after her hurried journey across the hall; ‘it’s all very well to say “cook,”—but “cook” *what?* and *how?* Does she expect *me* to cook? I don’t know cookery.’ And then, looking about her, she went up to a row of saucepans and lifted one up.

‘I suppose these must be—must be—well they are more like black basins with long handles than anything else I have ever seen,’ she said wonderingly. ‘Great heavy black things! *my* dinner shan’t be cooked in them.’

Then she went on and looked at a china dinner-set, and a tea-set, and some little basins with wreaths of pink flowers on them.

‘These are pretty,’ she said, and selected three of them and put them on the table.

She found a small jug of milk on a shelf, and half a small loaf of bread, and a wee bit of butter.

The milk she poured into one of the basins. ‘Hot milk I like,’ she said to herself, and she put the basin on the hot stove, while she dabbed the butter on the bread with her fingers, and began to bite at it.

Presently she heard a loud crack and splutter and fizzle behind her, and turning with a start she saw the basin split in two, and the milk spilt all over the top of

the stove, and fizzling and spluttering and making a horrible smoke and smell.

'How tiresome!' said Phillida, 'it must have been a bad basin. I'll get some more milk.'

She looked on all the shelves,—there were no cupboards,—but there was no more milk.

'I must have water then,' she said, and filled a second basin from a jug standing on the table, and placed that on the stove.

Presently the same thing happened as before, and the second basin lay in pieces beside the first, while the water spluttered and fizzled and steamed.

'Dear me,' said Phillida, 'how many basins would a cook use for a whole dinner, I wonder, if they break so easily as that? and how many would be wanted in a week? and how many in a——?'

But at that moment the big door opened, and in walked the Giantess, sniffing the air, and glaring at the broken basins.

'So,' she squeaked, 'two of my best china basins broken and milk spilt and burned, loaf half eaten and butter finished. *Very* well, if you choose to eat two days' meals all at once, of course you can. You're too fat to die with a little fasting. You'll pay for the breakages by missing one meal a day.'

Phillida stood with her eyes and mouth wide open staring in astonishment at the Giantess, not really understanding what she could mean.

In two steps the Giantess crossed the room, and reaching up to a shelf far above her head, brought down a plate with six sprigs of fried parsley on it, and one wafer; and from another part of the shelf a small bottle of raspberry vinegar and a liqueur glass.

‘If that is all you live on,’ said Phillida at last, as the Giantess began to nibble the wafer, ‘I don’t wonder you look like a hat-pin, Mrs.—er—Thin-Pin.’

The Giantess made a sound like the scraping of a slate-pencil on a slate, and threw out her arm to clutch at Phillida again. But Phillida was too quick for her this time, and slipped under the table, remembering the pricks of Dame Thin-Pin’s bones when she held her by the arm once before.

The Giantess couldn’t reach her under the table, so Phillida just stayed where she was till the Giantess went out through the door again, saying—

‘*Very* well. To-morrow will soon be here, and *then* you won’t escape me. You can sleep where you are to-night. Soft beds are not for such as you.’

‘Sleep where I am, indeed, with no bed?’ exclaimed Phillida, as she darted from under the table and after the Giantess, intending to follow her through the door and find a bed for herself somewhere or other; but she was too late, the door was closed softly before she reached it, and she heard a bolt drawn on the outside.

Phillida turned back, and began slowly to bite at the

piece of bread as she tried to think what she should do next.

The brick floor looked very cold and hard for a bed, and the one chair was only an ordinary wooden one, and very uncomfortable.

Poor little Phillida, who had never known discomfort or unkindness in her life before, did not know what to make of the Giantess and her behaviour to her at all; this was certainly not her idea of paying a visit. It seemed very lonely and still in the big kitchen, and it was beginning to get dark too.

Suddenly she heard a peculiar tapping sound, first in one part of the room, and then in another, but always near the ground. She turned her head this way and that as she listened, and at last began to move round the kitchen after the sound to try and find out what and where it was.

‘It seems to be behind the wainscot near the fireplace oftenest,’ said Phillida as she bent down and leant her ear to the wall.

‘Yes, yes!’ she went on eagerly, ‘here it is! and I can hear a tiny voice too. Some one seems to want me to let him or her out of somewhere,—“Get the coal-pick,” did you say? “and pull away the wainscot from the wall where you see it is nailed up?” What *is* a coal-pick, I wonder?’

Phillida got up and went to a huge box that stood in a corner of the kitchen where she had some time before

seen a stock of coal, and looked about till she found a shovel and a pick.

‘Wonder which is which?’ she said as she took up one in each hand, and went back to the fireplace.

First she tried to scrape the nailed-up piece of wainscot away from the wall with the shovel, and when that did not answer she took the coal-pick, saying—

‘Then this must be the right thing. I *wish* I knew about things and what they are.’

This answered better, and after a good deal of picking and hacking, she managed at last to pull away a square piece of the wainscot. Then to her delight she saw, through the hole she had made, a small passage, and out of it came skipping and hopping half a dozen little elves, dressed in browns and greys, the tallest not more than ten inches high.

‘Free at last! free at last!’ they cried as they skipped and twirled and danced about; ‘we were afraid we were shut in for ever when Dame Thin-Pin nailed up our door nearly a week ago. Horrid old thing! But she has not got ride of us yet, though.’

‘Do you live in the wall?’ asked Phillida. ‘How did you get anything to eat while the door was fastened? How hungry you must be! and, oh dear, I’ve eaten nearly all the bread and butter, and spilt all the milk. This is all there is left, but you shall have it if you will.’ And she tried to break off the bitten edge, and then handed the remains to the tallest elf. He made a deep

bow, and thanking her very much, broke off a few crumbs—which were *handfulls* of bread to him—and helped the other elves.

They finished the whole piece, and drank some cold water gratefully from a salt-spoon filled by Phillida.

And then, standing in a half circle, they clapped their hands, jumped two inches in the air, and all cried together—

‘She’s the first maid who has helped us, and has not been frightened. She is our friend, and *we* will help *her*.’

Phillida smiled delightedly, and clapped her hands too.

‘First,’ said the tallest elf, ‘she has told you to sleep *here* to-night without a bed, hasn’t she?’

‘Yes, she has,’ said Phillida.

‘*We* heard her,’ they all cried together.

‘Tie this rope round your little finger,’ said the tallest elf, handing her a little bit of white cotton.

‘And follow us,’ cried the others, running towards the great door.

Phillida got up and walked after them, tying the cotton round her finger as she went. But she did not arrive at the door as quickly as she had expected; and suddenly she found herself running as fast as ever she could, and trying to catch up the elves, wondering what had happened to her, for the door seemed quite a long journey away, and the elves did not seem nearly so tired as they had done. Or was it that——

‘That’s right, come along,’ said the elves as she reached them, ‘you’ve shrunk up to our size all right; you’ll do now.’ And then Phillida found that she was now the same size as the elves, and could follow them wherever they chose to lead her.

When they reached the door she saw a great rat-hole at the bottom of it, which she had not noticed before, and through this the elves were creeping.

Phillida followed them, and when they were all in the hall, the tallest elf told her to take the rope off her finger and give it back to him.

This she did, and at once found herself her own size again.

Then the elves set off running towards the staircase, and Phillida walked beside them.

At the foot of the steps she said—

‘I don’t see how you will ever get to the top of these stairs. I had better carry you, hadn’t I?’

‘Yes, carry us,’ they all said at once. So with one on each shoulder, one on each arm, and one in each side-pocket, Phillida started to climb the stairs; and ‘climbing’ it certainly was, and poor Phillida was glad to sit down and rest a bit when she finally reached the top.

Then the tallest elf, who was sitting on her right shoulder, said in a low voice—

‘Dame Thin-Pin’s greatest pride is her best spare-room. She always “housemaids” that room herself,

opens the windows every morning after breakfast, puts fresh water in the jug, dusts every single thing in the room, and at night turns down the sheet that the bed may be ready in case a certain wonderful fairy, of whom she has heard, should chance to come this way, and ask for a bed for the night. Dame Thin-Pin has heard that wherever this fairy has slept a night, her hostess next morning finds a fortune under the pillow. The door is always left open at night to give a more hospitable look. Now we have planned that *you* shall sleep there to-night, and we will sleep on the fur mat outside the door, and call you in plenty of time to-morrow morning, before Dame Thin-Pin awakes. Be sure you rumple the sheets and pillow-slips, and tumble the bed about as much as you can in the morning; she'll think her fairy has been sleeping here when she goes in in the morning, but she won't find a fortune under the pillow,' and he chuckled merrily.

'I'll remember,' said Phillida. 'Which is the room?'

The elves were already running off down a wide passage, and she followed them to the door of a vast bedroom, with a bed in it as big as two ordinary full-sized four-posters.

'It will take me a long time to rumple and tumble this great bed,' said Phillida, as she climbed up and laid herself down between the spotless sheets.

'Call me—early—please—call——,' and she dropped off to sleep without finishing her sentence.

The first thing she heard next morning was a chorus of little voices calling to her—

‘Get up, get up! it’s getting late. Will you *never* wake up?’ and then she felt little slaps all over her face, tugs at her hair, and at last even her eyelashes were pulled to open her eyes.

She started up and said—

‘Oh, I’m so sorry. Is there time to rumple the bed?’

‘Yes, yes, be quick!’ cried the elves, and Phillida pulled the sheets this way and that, jumped on the huge soft pillows, and pushed one of them on to the floor; and twisted the lace quilt half off the bed as she slipped to the ground and ran off after the elves.

She found them at the top of the stairs, and hastily picking them up, she scrambled down the long flight, as well as she could, to the hall below, and ran across it to the kitchen door.

There she put down the elves, and slipping the piece of cotton—which the tallest elf handed to her—on to her finger, she shrank till she was small enough to wriggle through the rat-hole. She was only just in time, for she heard a sound in the passage above, just as she pulled her last foot through the hole, which made her guess the Giantess was coming. Then she slipped off the bit of cotton, and returned to her own size again.

Just before she fastened up the little door in the wainscot after the elves had passed through, they said to her—

‘We’ll tell you a secret. Dame Thin-Pin is so thin that she can only be seen every other day, and *to-day* is not the other day. She keeps a maid just for the pleasure of beating and scratching her—whether she pleases her or not—on these days when the maid cannot see her, and does not know where she is, nor how to escape her.’

‘Wicked old thing!’ exclaimed Phillida. ‘Can’t I dodge her somehow?’

‘Another secret,’ whispered the youngest elf; ‘the bones in her feet rattle because she is so thin there is no flesh on them; listen for the rattle, and then slip under the table as it comes near you, and you’ll be safe. We’ll come again before dinner-time.’

As Phillida turned away from fastening up the wainscot door, the kitchen door opened wide, and she heard the rattling the elves had described, though she saw no one, and she went round to the far side of the table at once to be ready, saying cheerfully—

‘Good-morning, Dame Thin-Pin, I hope you slept as comfortably as I did?’

Rattle, crackle, rattle went the bones, and under the table went Phillida, just in time, and only just, for she felt a bit of her dress tear off in the Giantess’s hand as she clutched at it.

‘Slippery caterpillar!’ screamed the Giantess; ‘you’ll not escape me *all* to-day though, and it’ll be all the worse for you when I *do* get you. Listen to me. You’ll prepare my dinner. Two grilled butterflies, and the



The end of the "Other Day."

leaves of a rose crystallised. No more and no less, and if it is not done properly *I'll* show you who is mistress in this house. *You* ate your dinner yesterday, so you'll have none to-day.'

Then Phillida heard the bones rattle towards the door, which opened wide and closed again, but no bolt was drawn on the outside, so she remained where she was under the table. Presently the bones rattled and crackled again close to her, and Phillida knew she had been right in guessing that the Giantess was trying to trick her, and had only pretended to go through the door. As the rattle came to one side of the wide table, Phillida crouched at the other side, and so dodged round and round till the Giantess evidently gave up the chase and went away, 'slate-pencilling' and squeaking to herself as she went, and bolting the door after her.

'Now,' thought Phillida, 'she expects me to prepare her dinner for her. I should rather like to try to cook if I only knew how to begin; but *not* butterflies; *no*, I *won't* cook butterflies; besides, there are none here as far as I can see.' But she had spoken too quickly, for at that moment two beautiful white butterflies sailed down from the roof and settled on her hand.

'Pretty things,' said Phillida, 'you are quite safe with me. Oh dear, how hungry I am!'

There was nothing to eat in the kitchen, and nothing to drink but cold water, and even the fire was out.

Phillida wandered to the corner by the coal-box, and

then the sight of the coal-pick reminded her of the elves, and she went to the little door in the wainscot and tapped on it and then opened it; and immediately the six little elves appeared, saying—

‘Has she gone?’

‘Yes,’ said Phillida, ‘and she has told me to cook two butterflies for her dinner, and the petals of a rose crystallised as a sweet. But there is nothing whatever for us.’

‘Oh, that’s all right,’ said the elves; ‘we’ll get your breakfast for you now you have let us out.’

‘Mayn’t I come with you?’ begged Phillida, as she saw them making for the rat-hole.

‘No, she might miss you and find out if you went,’ said the elves, as they slipped one after the other through the rat-hole.

Very soon they came back carrying a number of parcels containing tea, sugar, butter, a tin of swiss milk, a long thin roll of bread, one egg, and some salt.

Then they showed Phillida how to build a fire in the grate and light it, and then how to fill a saucepan with water from the tap, to set it on the fire to boil, and to make the tea, and boil the egg.

‘Now,’ said the tallest elf, ‘break a big piece off the roll of bread, open the tin of milk, crack the egg, and put everything inside our door. Roll up the footstool in the table-cloth and put it under the table that Dame Thin-Pin may think it is you, asleep, if she comes in. Then

slip the rope on to your finger, and come through the little door and have your breakfast with us in peace.'

Phillida obeyed all the elf's orders as quickly as possible, and when they were all safely inside the little passage, she saw how wise the elf had been to tell her to break the bread and crack the egg and open the tin before she became too small to tackle these things.

One egg had seemed to her a very small breakfast for herself and six elves when she was her own size, but now she found it ample for all seven of them.

'But shan't I be dreadfully hungry when I grow again?' she asked when they had finished.

'You aren't hungry now, are you?' said the smallest elf.

'No,' said Phillida; 'no, *indeed* I'm not.'

'Very well then, you'll still be yourself when you are your own size again, so of course you won't feel any different,' said the elf, looking at her rather condescendingly.

'Oh,' said Phillida, not feeling much wiser than before, but not liking to say so.

'Sh! sh! sh!' said the middle-sized elf, 'I hear the bones! she is coming!'

'What if she finds out it is only the footstool and not me under the table?' whispered Phillida a little anxiously.

'She daren't stoop down far enough to look at it,' said the tallest elf, 'for fear her bones should fall apart,

there is so little flesh to hold them together, you see ; and she knows if she once falls down she'll crumple up and die. That's why you were quite safe under the table.'

Rattle, crackle, crunch went the bones as the Giantess stalked round the kitchen, and squeak, screech, scrape went her voice as she called for Phillida and got no answer.

'What a rage she is in!' whispered the elves, and they chuckled as they heard the following—

'Who slept in the best spare bed? Who *dared* to rumple the sheets and the pillows? Skrck—skrck—skrck——'

'I'm glad I'm in here with you,' said Phillida ; 'it sounds prickly in the kitchen.'

Meanwhile the rattles and skrcks went on, getting louder and more furious.

'Where is the minx?—skrck—I'll crunch her when I find her!—skrck—she *can't* have got out with the door bolted. If it *was* the fairy who slept in the bed, then who stole the money? If it wasn't the fairy, then who *dared* sleep there? The girl shall be punished anyway, whether she did or did not—I must have *some* comfort—I'll tear her hair out, and scratch her, and poke her eyes out—skrck—skrck——'

Phillida chuckled softly to herself as she listened behind the wainscot, enjoying the discomfort of the Giantess when she failed to find her and tear her hair out.

After a time the elves heard the rattles and skrcks go towards the door, and the smallest one skipped along the passage behind the wainscot till he was close to the big door, and then he listened to the sounds till he was sure the Giantess had really gone out into the hall and shut the door and bolted it after her.

Then Phillida went back into the kitchen, and, borrowing the cotton, returned to her own size again, while two of the elves went to collect rose-leaves from the garden—both pink and white—and two more went to fetch a new potato.

When they returned, Phillida watched with great interest while they prepared the Giantess's dinner.

First the pink rose-leaves were crystallised, and put aside on a sheet of white paper to dry. Then the potato was partly boiled and cut into pieces the shape of a butterfly's body, while white rose-leaves were formed into wings; and then, just before the Giantess's dinner-hour, these were delicately grilled and put ready on a plate for her, on a shelf as high up as Phillida could reach when standing on the chair.

Punctually to the moment in came the Giantess, with rattles and crackles and skrcks, and Phillida retreated behind the table.

'Skrck—skrck—No dinner cooked, *I'll* be bound,' she squeaked, sniffing the air. And then, as Phillida said afterwards, there seemed to be some sort of a grim smile about in the room somewhere, though she couldn't

exactly see it, as the Giantess found the meal prepared for her, and ate it all up with relish, thinking she was enjoying real butterflies all the time.

But the smile could not have lasted long, for suddenly Phillida heard the warning rattles and crackles, and knew, as she skipped under the table, that she had just missed being caught by the long arm of the Giantess, who was furious at not yet having caught her once all through the day.

At bedtime the elves again led Phillida to the best spare room, where she found the bed prepared with fresh untumbled sheets and pillow-slips once more, and the elves left her, and went to keep guard on the fur rug outside the door.

Just about dawn, Phillida was awakened suddenly by the elves, who whispered—

‘She’s coming! she’s coming to see if the fairy is sleeping in the bed, and to look for the fortune under the pillow. Slip under the bed; it is so low she daren’t stoop to pull you out. Tumble the bed-clothes as you go.’

Phillida was just in time to hide herself before she heard rattle, crackle, rattle, and in crept the Giantess with a lighted candle in her hand.

Now this was the beginning of the other day on which the Giantess could once more be seen; so Phillida, peeping from under the bed, saw her look of excitement and greedy joy when she found the bed had been

slept in, and watched her tumble the pillows and bed-clothes about to look for the fortune she expected to find.

Skrck—skrck—rattle and crunch—skrck—skrck——

‘Where *can* she have hidden it?’ squeaked the Giantess.

At this moment Phillida, in her eagerness to see better, crept farther from under the bed, and bumped against the Giantess’s foot, chuckling aloud with glee at the failure of the Giantess to find the fortune.

‘Ha! what’s that?’ squeaked the Giantess, and forgetting everything but the possibility of finding either the fairy or her fortune, she suddenly went down on her knees and made a grab at Phillida, still squeaking—

‘Skrck—skrck—I’ve got you at last!’ But with many a fearsome crackle and groan and rattle and skrck her bones fell apart, and she lay in a crumpled heap on the floor, never to get up again.

‘Hurrah, hurrah! come out and look at *us*!’ cried the elves to Phillida; ‘she’s killed herself at last with her greed, and we are free!’

And out came Phillida from under the bed, and found, instead of six tiny elves, six great tall boys, who explained to her that they were orphans, and that the Giantess had been their step-aunt and guardian; and in order that she might get the castle and everything in it for her own, she had bewitched them and turned them into tiny creatures such as they were when Phillida had come.

The Giantess had tried to starve them to death, and when she had found out their hiding-place behind the wainscot, she had watched till they were all inside one day and then had nailed up their door, thinking to be rid of them once for all.

‘And if it had not been for you, Phillida,’ said the tallest boy, ‘we should have died there as she intended.’

And after that Phillida learned to keep house for her ‘six great elves,’ as she called them, and they lived together happily ever after in the big castle. And the village children were no longer afraid to go in through the big gates, or to ask to see the little mistress of the house, for there was no Dame Thin-Pin to frighten or hurt them ever any more.

THE QUEEN OF BEAUTY

THE Princess Charmis, only daughter of the King of a great country, was very beautiful, and in consequence very much admired. Her parents and all the courtiers, wishing to make her life happier than any life had yet been, did their best, unintentionally, to spoil her, by telling her from her babyhood up that she was the most beautiful child that had ever lived; and she was never tired of hearing the oft-told tale.

She would sit before a mirror, for hours at a time, putting on and off endless numbers of beautiful garments, gazing at herself and admiring her long golden hair, her large blue eyes, and her delicate pink and white skin; and the rest of the day she would lie on a couch in her boudoir—which had a mirror in every wall—or in a silken hammock in the garden, running her fingers through her curls, and thinking of nothing and no one but herself.

The King despaired of her ever learning to govern the kingdom before she came to the throne at his

death; and the Queen nearly wore herself out in her efforts to add to the happiness of her daughter's life, and at the same time to carry out all the duties that should have been shared by the Princess.

She would not walk, as there were so many ready and willing to fetch and carry for her; she would not ride her beautiful white horse, because she could not see herself as she rode; and she would not attend the state balls and concerts got up in her honour, because she preferred to lie still and gaze at her own reflection in the glass, while she listened to the expressions of admiration of those who came to see her—a few at a time, so that she could hear and enjoy every word that was said in her praise.

The King and Queen tried to arouse her interest in a variety of things, fearing that she might become imbecile if she never used her brain. They engaged the finest musicians to come and make music for her, and try to teach her to sing and play; but she would neither listen nor learn, and lay smiling lazily at them, as she waved them away with her beautiful little white hand.

Then they tried art. But to the artists she said—

‘There is no one and nothing so beautiful on earth as I am, therefore you cannot show me anything worth looking at. Take the pictures away.’

And she turned to the mirror that stood always near to her elbow, and smiled at her own image.

The Queen grew so anxious that she sent for the Court physicians, fearing that the Princess was suffering from some obscure disease; it certainly could not be any ordinary illness, for no one could eat and sleep better, or look more blooming than did the Princess, and she had no aches or pains of any kind.

But when the doctors arrived, bowing low and paying her a compliment every time they opened their lips, she smiled graciously at them, and said—

‘I am perfectly well, thank you, and in no need of any physic, for you cannot make me more beautiful than I already am.’

The Queen was relieved to hear that the doctors could find nothing wrong with the health of the Princess, but she still did not feel happy about her.

‘If she would at least use her fingers, and do a little needlework, it would be better than doing absolutely nothing all day long,’ she thought. And then she sent for the best embroideresses in the land. But when they came with their needles and silks, and slipped a little gold thimble set with diamonds on the Princess’s finger, and tried to persuade her to make a few stitches, she said—

‘There is no need for me to work. *You* can make all the embroideries I need.’ But she kept the little gold thimble on her finger to play with, while she smiled contentedly at the looks and words of admiration that the embroideresses could not restrain.

Every one who came to the Court had some new remedy to suggest to the King and Queen, and the Princess saw them all just for the pleasure of hearing their exclamations of wonder and awe at her marvellous beauty. But they made not the slightest difference to the life of the Princess; she ate, she slept, she dressed as before, and she lay on her couch, or in her hammock, placidly smiling at herself and playing with her long golden hair, but nothing else would she do the livelong day, week in and week out.

At last, one day there came to the Palace, among other remedy-mongers, a small hunchback, with short thin legs, and long thin arms and a thin white face. He begged for a private audience with the Princess, telling the King that he had a sovereign remedy that could not fail to cure her, but it was a great secret, and could only be revealed to her when quite alone.

‘What do you ask in payment if you should succeed in rousing the Princess, and making her able to walk, and ride, and take an interest in other things besides her own unsurpassed beauty?’ asked the King.

‘I ask that I may be allowed to clean the shoes that she will wear when she goes out walking, to groom the horse she will mount when she goes out riding, and to carry the train she will wear when she goes to Court, or hold her bouquet when she dances at the Court balls,’ said the Hunchback.

‘A very modest request, easily granted,’ said the

King, comparing it in his own mind with the promises he had made to many others of a portion of his kingdom, or an ample fortune to be paid on completion of the cure.

The Princess was lying asleep on the couch in her boudoir, as it was a dull cloudy day. Her silken gauze dress lay in soft white folds over her graceful figure, the gold-embroidered hem barely covering the dainty little feet in their golden slippers. One arm, from which the sleeve fell away at the elbow, was flung back on the soft pillow, and the little hand, lying palm upwards, showed shell-pink against the white cover; while the other arm hung down over the side of the couch, half hidden by a long tress of golden hair, the hand resting on a heap of pale pink roses which had fallen at the foot of the mirror.

‘Poor little thing, how ugly she is,’ said the Hunchback to himself as he entered the room, and heard the door close behind him.

The Princess stirred uneasily in her sleep as he gazed at her, and with a gentle sigh she opened her blue eyes. Then, seeing her visitor, she smiled graciously, expecting the usual exclamation of admiration. And then, as none seemed to be forthcoming, she murmured—

‘I am more beautiful than any one else.’

‘No,’ said the Hunchback quietly, ‘you are not beautiful,’ and he added under his breath, ‘not yet.’

‘Oh, you are blind then?’ said the Princess, looking up at him.

But the grey eyes that met hers, and looked deep into them, were not blind.

‘I see—I see——’ said the Hunchback, slowly considering his words.

‘What do you see?’ asked the Princess.

‘Nothing—nothing at all,’ said the Hunchback.

A look of surprise passed over the face of the Princess, for she had never heard anything like this before, and the quiet gaze of those grey eyes, set deep in the white face, made her feel uncomfortable—though she could not have explained why—and she did not at once dismiss the owner of them from her presence.

Catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror the uneasiness vanished, and she smiled again, and blew a kiss on the tips of her fingers to her own reflection.

‘There is no one so beautiful as I am,’ she repeated contentedly.

‘I have come from over the mountains that lie to the west where the sun sets,’ said the Hunchback, ‘and I heard of the Queen of Beauty who is coming one day to reign here.’

‘That cannot be,’ said the Princess happily; ‘I am the only “Queen of Beauty.”’

The Hunchback went on as though he had not heard—

‘But *you* will never see the Queen of Beauty——’

‘That is very true,’ said the Princess, ‘as she does not exist.’

‘You have no strength—you could not climb those mountains,’ continued the Hunchback.

‘There is no need,’ said the Princess. ‘If I chose to wish to see any one who lived at the other side of the world even, I have only to say so, and they would be brought to me.’

‘The Queen of Beauty cannot be so reached,’ said the Hunchback.

‘Well, as she does not exist, and I have no wish to see her even if she did, it does not in the least matter,’ said the Princess indifferently. ‘Now go!’

The Hunchback bowed low, and the grey eyes travelled slowly from the top of the golden head to the tips of the little golden slippers, and he said in a low voice, half to himself, as he backed out of the room—

‘Poor little useless feet!’

‘Useless?’ said the Princess in surprise, when she was once more alone, ‘*useless?* There is nothing they need do except look beautiful. What a queer creature that was! *His eyes* must be useless, I should think, for though they did not *seem* blind—no, they certainly did not seem blind when they looked into mine—yet——’

The Princess lay pondering for some minutes, then moved restlessly, and turned for relief to her mirror.

A mist seemed to have fallen over the surface and she could only see herself dimly, and she rang a little

jewelled bell that stood near to her hand, and ordered the young slave, who answered the summons, to polish the mirror at once.

The slave obeyed humbly, though, as she had burnished it to the highest pitch of brilliancy only that morning, and to her eyes it shone more brightly than usual, she could not understand the Princess's curious and seemingly unnecessary command.

The restless fit clung to the Princess all that day, and still her mirror looked dim.

The King and the Queen noticed the change in the Princess, but did not dare to speak to her or to any one else about it, as the Hunchback had said his sovereign remedy was a secret, and they were too loyal to try to find it out.

Once the Princess was actually seen to rise to her feet, and walk from her couch to the hammock, instead of calling for her litter; though, it is true, she went slowly and stumbled many times.

'No strength?' she said to herself; 'that odd little creature was wrong again. I can walk if I like. I have come now all the way from my boudoir—quite *twenty* yards—to the hammock, on my own feet. They are *not* "useless." It is hardly worth while, though,' she added, as she laid herself down among the cushions with a sigh of relief, 'except just to prove that I am not without strength.'

Nevertheless, she began to walk a little every day.

The Hunchback had not left the Palace, though the Princess did not see him again until one very hot day when she lay in her hammock, and awoke from a short sleep to see him standing a little way off gazing at her ; and, as she roused, he turned away, and she heard him say, half to himself—

‘ Poor little useless hands.’

‘ Useless hands ? ’ said the Princess sleepily ; ‘ there is nothing they need do except look beautiful. And that they do to perfection,’ she added, as she turned them this way and that, and held them up to the light that she might see their delicate transparency.

‘ Of course I could embroider beautifully, if I chose—but there is no need.’

All that day the words of the Hunchback haunted her, till at last she thought—

‘ He shall see that my hands are not useless any more than my feet,’ and she sent for her work materials, and made her little slave set the pattern, and thread the needle for her.

Then, with the jewelled thimble on her finger and the needle in her hand, she began to stitch. But the silk slipped from the eye of the needle, and the point of it ran into her finger, and she laid down the work and said—

‘ It is not worth while. Though, of course, I *could* do it if I chose to spoil my hands,’ and she lay looking at herself in the mirror—which still seemed to her to

be misty in spite of its many burnishings—trying to forget, but without much success, that she had ever heard such words as ‘useless hands,’ At last she said—

‘My hands *can't* be useless, they are so perfectly beautiful.’ But there was a faint hint of doubt in the tone of her voice, and to the Queen’s delight, she sent for the head embroideress and told her to work before her that she might watch what she did.

Then she shut herself up in her boudoir, refusing to allow any one to come in, while she worked away with her needle, trying to imitate all she had seen the embroideress do the day before, saying to herself—

‘I will *prove* that my hands are not useless.’

One day the Princess, taking a rather longer walk than usual down one of the green alleys in the garden, heard a voice coming from the other side of a thick hedge. Some one was reading aloud, and she heard as she passed—

‘—she is more beautiful than any one else’ (‘Ah,’ thought the Princess, ‘he is reading about me!’); ‘her hands and her feet are never idle; her thoughts are never for herself. She is not aware of her own beauty——’

‘Not know she is beautiful?’ said the Princess to herself in amazement, ‘then she is either blind, or else her life is not worth living. I expect it is the “Queen of Beauty” of whom that odd little man is always thinking,’ and she strolled on, idly dreaming, and still

doubting the existence of any Queen of Beauty besides herself; though gradually she began to feel a sort of curiosity to see for herself this person so greatly admired by the only human being she had ever met who had not paid her even one single compliment.

‘The odd little man said I should not be able to send for his Queen,’ her thoughts went on. ‘Very well then—I shall go and look for her, and prove that I have plenty of strength.’

Then she gave orders for her litter to be brought to the door of the Palace; and when the King and Queen heard of it they were delighted at such an unusual occurrence, though they dared not show their joy to the Princess in any way, except by providing an escort for her safety.

When the Princess was settled among the cushions of her litter, with a small mirror hung on the curtain at her side, she gave orders to her bearers to carry her to the mountains. They looked at one another in consternation when they heard the command, for the mountains were many long miles away, and the road was anything but smooth beyond the grounds of the Palace. However, they did not dare to disobey, and raising the litter, they set off in the direction indicated by their mistress.

All went well for a time, and then, as the Palace grounds were left behind, and the road became rougher and finally disappeared altogether, the chief of the

escort respectfully begged the Princess to allow them to turn back.

‘No,’ she returned, ‘I *said* to the mountains,’ and she waved to the bearers to go forward. But, gradually, first one and then another of her train fell on the rough stones, and could not drag themselves along ; till at last one of the only two remaining bearers stumbled and fell, and broke the litter in doing so. And then he and his fellow, fearing the anger of the Princess, slipped away and hid among the rocks, leaving her standing alone at the foot of the mountain.

‘Lazy things!’ she cried, stamping her foot, and calling to them angrily to return and mend the litter that they might continue the journey.

Finding at last that she could get no answer to her repeated calls, she turned towards the mountain, saying—

‘Very well, I shall go on alone then.’

The rough stones cut and hurt her thinly shod feet, and the sun poured down on her uncovered face and hands, and burnt and blistered the delicate skin all unused to such exposure. Her eyelids became swollen, and her eyes bloodshot with the glare, till she would not have believed in her own reflection had she remembered to carry her mirror with her that she had left hanging on the curtain of the broken litter.

Before very long she also stumbled and fell, cutting her hand on a sharp flint, and exclaiming—

‘Oh, *how* my hands and face burn! they feel on fire!’ as she lay on the ground, too weary to rise at once.

All her life she had been surrounded by every luxury and comfort; slaves had run to gratify her every wish, and she had never found herself in any difficulty that could not be instantly swept away. She could not even now believe that she had been left quite alone, and presently she sat up and clapped her hands (the signal she had been accustomed to use to call her slaves when she lay in her hammock, and there was no bell at hand). But no slave appeared.

She got up, feeling more puzzled than angry, and started once more on her way up the mountain. She had reached a small group of trees where the ground was covered with grass. It was rather cooler here, and the walking became easier and more pleasant, and she thought that it must now be a shorter distance to the top of the mountain than all the way back again to the Palace; and she said to herself—

‘I *will* prove to that odd little man that *I* am the only Queen of Beauty, and——’ but she stopped short, for she had come to the foot of a great precipice, and could not see which way to turn.

She walked as far as she could to the left, and then turned and walked back, trying to find a way up, or round, the great rock wall.

Even then she did not own herself beaten—she, the most beautiful person in all the world, whose every wish

had *always* been gratified—and she stood leaning against the rock, gazing with half-seeing eyes over the plain towards the Palace, which was hidden in the far distance ; and there she waited for something to happen to smooth away her difficulties, and take her up to the top of the mountain.

Presently, from the side of the great rock that she had not explored, there appeared the figure of a little old lady, whose soft white hair lay in smooth braids under a hood of the same thin blue material as her dress, faded to many shades of paler blue and even grey on the outer folds. The Princess was hardly sure that it was a real person at first, so shadowy and unreal did she appear.

As she came near enough for her to see her face, the Princess was startled for the moment at the beauty of it, and at the wonderful look of youth in the eyes, in spite of the white hair and the deep lines in the ivory skin.

‘Come,’ said the old lady, ‘and I will bind up your hand’ ; and the Princess followed her along the foot of the precipice to the mouth of a cave half hidden by a great bush.

It was very cool inside the dimly lighted cave after the great heat outside, but it took some minutes before the Princess’s eyes became sufficiently accustomed to the semi-darkness to enable her to realise what an immense place she was in.

The old lady first attended to her hand and bound it up in a cool wet rag, and bathed the burning face with a soothing lotion. Then she led her to a low seat by the side of a small table set for two people, saying, as she sat down at one side of it, and motioned to the Princess to seat herself at the other—

‘I expected you, you see, my dear.’

‘Do you know who I am?’ asked the Princess a little haughtily, not liking the unaccustomed want of ceremony.

‘Yes, you are one of those from the “outside,”’ said the old lady; ‘you have never seen the “inside” yet.’

The Princess was much mystified with this answer to her question, but she was so tired and hungry that she sat down on the low seat and took what the old lady offered her, merely murmuring—

‘I am the Princess Charmis—most beautiful in all the world.’

After the Princess was rested and refreshed she called for a mirror, and the old lady rose and set one before her, bringing a brush for her hair also.

But the instant the Princess looked in the glass, her usual smile of complete satisfaction at what she expected to see gave place to a look of anger.

‘How dare you show me a mirror with such an ugly face reflected in it?’ she asked, as she pushed it from her, and rising from her low seat, turned her back upon

the old lady, and walked towards another large mirror set in the rock wall of the cave.

The reflection in this proved to be the same as that in the other mirror, and she moved away from it in disgust, saying—

‘Your mirrors are all bewitched!’ For what she had seen was a red blistered face, with swollen eyelids and bloodshot eyes, and she never for one moment imagined it to be her own.

‘My mirrors are the mirrors of truth,’ said the old lady, ‘and are not bewitched. It is your own self that you see reflected in them. Look again, and move your head and arms that you may know it is yourself.’

The Princess did look once more, and was at last obliged to believe it really was her own reflection that she saw, and she asked in a faint little voice full of despair—

‘Are all other mirrors bewitched then? Do they all tell a false tale? Even my own?’

And then feeling the tears, which she was too proud to shed, welling up in her eyes and making them smart, she stamped her foot smartly on the rock floor, and added impatiently—

‘Can’t you *do* something? I will *not* lose my beauty.’

‘I can do something for you,’ answered the old lady gently, ‘if you will do all I tell you, faithfully.’

‘Tell me what it is, and I will see whether or no I will do it,’ said the Princess, doubtfully, not wishing to give in at once.

But the old lady looked at her quietly, and then, evidently reading her thoughts, walked away without speaking, taking the answer for ‘No.’

The Princess, fearing she would lose sight of her in the shadows of the cave, called to her and asked again to be told what she would be required to do, and still receiving no answer, began to follow her down the length of the cave.

Before the Princess reached her she *did* lose sight of the little figure for a moment or two in one of the deep shadows of the cave; and then, as she could not bear the thought of having perhaps lost her beauty and all chance of recovering it for ever, she called again to the old lady, and said—

‘I promise! I promise! I will do all you tell me, if only you will show me where to find my beauty.’

Then the old lady came to her again, and, taking her hand in hers, said to her—

‘Look well at this rock.’

The Princess looked straight before her, and gradually over the flat surface of the rock there spread a faint blue mist; and when in a few moments it had slowly cleared away, the Princess saw through the rock a room in the Palace, which she recognised as the Queen’s own private sitting-room.

‘Oh!’ exclaimed the Princess, ‘that is my mother’s own room——’

‘And these are her slippers,’ said the old lady; ‘put them on and step into the room. I will wait for you.’

The Princess did as she was bid, and stood alone in the middle of the room, wondering what would happen next.

Then she felt a curious change come over her, and she sat down on a low couch, saying—

‘Oh, how weary I am! and how worried I feel about some one.’

She leant back against the cushions, but she could not rest. There were voices in the air asking her questions, the answers to which she could not give, and there seemed to be endless duties pressing upon her that she had not sufficient time or strength to fulfil, and she called—

‘Is there no one to help me?’ and the voices in the air answered—

‘The Princess Charmis might if she would, Your Majesty.’

The Princess put up her hands to her head in bewilderment.

‘*Who* am I? Am I my mother, the Queen?’ she exclaimed.

Then she felt the hand of the little old lady in hers, and heard her say gently—

‘No, but you are standing in her shoes for a moment,’ and she led her back into the cave again.

The Princess stood quite still, her eyes gazing away into the depths of the shadowy cave, repeating to herself the words—

“‘The Princess Charmis might if she would”—Charmis might—why I never thought of that! I did not know how my mother felt. Oh—dear.’

The blue mist was once more playing over the face of the rock, and as it cleared away the Princess saw the private room of her father, the King, in which he was accustomed to attend to the affairs of the State. She was just going to step into it, hoping to chase away the unpleasant feeling her last experience had left with her, when the old lady checked her, pointing to an old pair of shoes lying before her on the floor, and saying—

‘Your own slippers will not take you in there.’

‘But those shoes are far too large for me; I can never move about in them,’ declared the Princess.

‘Remember your promise,’ said the old lady quietly; and the Princess stooped at once, and drew on the big shoes in place of her own.

Once more she felt a curious change come over her when she stepped, or rather shuffled, into the middle of the room, and she said to herself—

‘This time I know I am standing in my father’s shoes. But oh! how anxious and perplexed I feel!

There seems to be no way out of some great difficulty. What *can* it be?’

She leant her elbows on a high desk covered with papers, and dropped her head in her hands to think out the trouble, saying aloud—

‘What *is* this great difficulty? is there no one who can tell me——’

Then the voices in the air answered—

‘The heir to the throne is the Princess Charmis.’

‘Yes,’ said the Princess to herself with a smile of pleasure.

‘But,’ said another single voice, ‘the Princess Charmis knows nothing about the government of the country, and cares still less for the welfare of the people.’

‘The Princess Charmis might if she would,’ said the first voices.

And then once more the Princess was led back into the cave, and stood thinking so deeply, that she was quite unconscious of the searching gaze of those beautiful eyes of the old lady, who stood so quietly beside her.

At last she moved, and said slowly as before—

‘I had not thought of that. It is true there *is* no one but me to come after my father, and I know nothing—*nothing* of the people, or how to govern them. How can I learn? Oh, *what* must I do?’ she asked, clinging to the hand of the little old lady, whose gentle voice was repeating—



The Princess+++ drew her veil over her face.

“The Princess Charmis might if she would.” Go back and try; and you shall take a pair of slippers with you as a present from me, and when you are puzzled just put them on. They are called “other peoples’ shoes.”’

‘Had I not better wear them always?’ said the Princess a little wistfully.

‘No, they would wear out too quickly, and become useless,’ said the old lady. ‘Hang them at your side, in this little bag, that they may be always ready when you need them. Now return to your home; your escort awaits you at the foot of the mountain. Farewell, and do not forget what you have seen of the “inside”’; and she dropped a little soft kiss on the forehead of the Princess, which, unknown to her, restored all her former beauty, and disappeared among the shadows of the cave.

The kiss reminded the Princess of the beauty she thought she had lost for ever, and she drew her veil over her face and put the thought from her, saying to herself as she passed through the small group of trees—

‘That is only the “outside,” I see that now.’

When she reached the foot of the mountain she found her escort waiting for her, looking very much ashamed of having failed her on the journey, and very much relieved to have found her again unharmed.

She stepped into her litter and began the return journey, and not till then did she remember that she

had gone out to find the 'Queen of Beauty,' and had only seen an old, old lady with white hair, dressed in a faded old gown, shadowy and indistinct, who did not in any way come near to her idea of a 'Queen.'

'Though she had a beautiful look in her eyes,' the Princess said to herself. 'More beautiful than ever mine possessed,' she added a little sadly. 'The odd little man said I should never see the Queen of Beauty, and he is right, so far.'

When she reached the Palace she was received as though she had only been for a morning's outing of an hour or so, and no one seemed to guess that anything unusual had happened, as she passed up to her own apartments.

She had dropped her veil as she reached her boudoir, and so lost was she in her thoughts, that she did not for some moments realise that she was standing before one of the long mirrors.

'Ah,' she said, as she became aware of what she was looking at, 'that was what I used to think I looked like. Now I *know* what I am really like. The mirrors in the cave told me the real truth, these are false—they are bewitched—I will have none of them.' And she ordered them all to be removed, for the face in the glass looked just as it always had done in the old times, and she could not believe now that it really was her own reflection, knowing as she did what the glasses in the cave had shown her.

The slaves were amazed at her orders, but carried them out at once in silence.

When those who came to pay court to the Princess paid her the usual flowery compliments—without which it would have been almost dangerous to speak to her before—she told them she did not wish ever to hear such speeches again; and they went away crestfallen and bewildered.

‘What can have happened?’ said they to each other; ‘our Princess is even more beautiful than before, and yet she will not allow the subject to be mentioned, and tells us our eyes deceive us.’

The King and Queen said nothing, though they rejoiced greatly in secret, when they saw the change in their daughter.

And when, instead of spending the whole day lying idly looking at and admiring herself in the glass, the Princess went to her mother and asked her to allow her to be with her and help her in her many duties; and then went on to the King and asked humbly to be taught and trained to work with him, in order that she might eventually learn to govern the kingdom ready for the time that would inevitably come when she would succeed him, they were overwhelmed with joy.

They sent for the Hunchback and tried to load him with gifts and honours, but he refused them all, and only said—

‘I ask for nothing better than to clean the shoes

my Princess will wear when she walks, to groom the horse, she will mount when she rides with His Majesty the King to visit the people and learn to govern them, and to carry her train or hold her bouquet when she takes upon her shoulders a share of the burdens which lie so heavy on those of Her Majesty the Queen.'

So the King had to content himself with granting the small requests of the Hunchback. But he signed a royal decree giving the posts of groom and train-bearer to the Princess Royal of that land to him and his heirs for ever.

The Princess began to walk and to ride about everywhere with the King, learning to know the people whose Queen she would one day become; and to the great happiness of the Queen, she took her place at Court, and relieved Her Majesty of many of her most irksome duties.

At the close of the grandest Court ball of the year, longing for a breath of fresh air after the heat and crush of the ballroom, the Princess stepped out on to the terrace that ran in front of the long windows of the great hall.

She stood at the top of a short flight of steps leading to the garden, slowly moving her fan to and fro, and taking in long breaths of the cool night air.

At the foot of the steps, in the shadow, stood the Hunchback, still holding the Princess's bouquet. And looking up at her as she stood above him, he said—

‘I see—I see——’

The Princess was startled for a moment, not knowing the Hunchback was there, and said quickly—

‘What do you see?’

‘I see,’ he answered slowly, ‘I see—the Queen of Beauty——’

‘Where? Where is she?’ asked the Princess eagerly, looking about her. ‘I see no one here.’

But the Hunchback had laid her flowers at her feet, and slipped silently away in the darkness, leaving her question unanswered. For the ‘Queen of Beauty’ is not aware of her own beauty, and the Princess never knew it was herself of whom he spoke.

THE ENCHANTED BOWL

IN a little old town far away in the south, where even in winter it is fine and warm, the children were playing together after school hours in the wide open space before the Inn. In and out of the leafless plane trees and little tables set ready for coffee-parties they ran, laughing and calling to each other, and sometimes falling and rolling over and over in the dust, as happy as they could be.

A large travelling carriage, with four horses jingling the bells on their gay-coloured harness, was drawn up at the Inn door.

Sitting inside it was a little girl about ten years old, evidently tired with a long journey, and disappointed at not being allowed to get out of the carriage and go to her father, who stood talking to the landlord just within the door.

Her blue-grey travelling coat suited her fair skin and hair and her blue eyes—so different from the dark eyes and sun-tanned skins of the little school children



The Enchanted Bowl.

who had stopped their games to stand and stare at the strangers.

A glass of goat's milk was handed in at the carriage window to the little girl, and she drank it off as though very thirsty; and then, as the carriage moved off again, she nodded and smiled at the children, and waved her hand to one little girl who stood by herself leaning against the stem of one of the plane trees.

As the carriage disappeared from view with a whirl of dust, and a jingle of harness-chains and bells and cracks of the whip, the little girl under the plane tree moved slowly away, stretching out her arms and saying—

‘How hot the sun is! I shan’t play out here any more.’

She turned down a narrow street, and passed through a door into a cool dim old shop full of old furniture, and curious pieces of brass and copper that glimmered from dusky corners.

In the window were displayed old china bowls, plates, odd cups and saucers, silver jugs, spoons, ladles, and trays of jewellery, and small snuff-boxes, and oddments in endless variety; and draped behind these, as a background, were gorgeous pieces of flowered brocade and embroideries, and odd lengths of wonderful lace yellow with age.

The child wound her way in and out of the chairs, and chests, and tables, to a corner where stood a gaunt

old cupboard with only one of its two doors left hanging on a single rusty hinge.

The deep shelf within held all that the child possessed of her very own—a string of pink coral beads, a few copper coins, and a bundle of baby clothes. These last she had been wearing when she was found by old Anselmo, lying deserted on the steps of the little church at Camarana—a small village on the coast—many miles away from the town in which his shop stood.

He had carried her home with him nearly nine years ago, and had cared for her as well as he could ever since.

No one had ever claimed the child, and no one knew her name. So he had called her 'Camarana' after the place where he had found her, and the name had become shortened to 'Rana' (which in English means a little frog) for everyday use.

Anselmo was a poor man and had hard work to keep his shop going; and when Rana grew old enough to understand, her greatest wish was to be able some day to repay Anselmo for all his goodness to her.

On the shelf, by the side of the bundle of baby clothes, lay some bits of rag, and a broken saucer with some dark-looking paste for polishing in it.

These Rana felt for in the dim light, and carried, together with one or two copper bowls, to the one place in the shop where the sunshine could penetrate, and where there was therefore light enough to work by.

She sat down on a richly carved four-legged stool, the sunlight touching the copper bowls and making them gleam against the dark folds of her shabby old velvet frock, which, though much stained and worn, still retained some of its original orange-red hue, now fading rapidly to flame-colour in the threadbare parts.

Now and then Anselmo gave her a few of the smallest coins of the country for polishing some of his pieces of copper and brass; for he said the bright bits lit up the dark shop, and helped to catch the eyes of those who passed by, and to attract them to come in and buy. Once he brought her an old dress that he had bought at a sale, but he was not able to do that often.

Rana was thinking, as she sat polishing, of the child whom she had seen in the travelling carriage that day, with her blue eyes and fair hair. She had never seen any one like her before, and she wove stories about her as she bent over the bowl, rubbing and burnishing the metal till she could almost see her own little dark head, with its wealth of short curls, reflected in it.

So far away were her thoughts, that it was some time before she noticed an old man, in a tattered blue cloak thrown Spanish fashion over one shoulder, standing just inside the door of the shop, and patiently waiting to be served.

She jumped up in a hurry, and murmuring that she was sorry for having kept him waiting, and that she would call Anselmo at once, she started to run to the

workshop at the back, when she was stopped by the old man, who said in a trembling voice—

‘I have no money wherewith to buy, child; I came to ask for help——’

‘Oh, you are ill, and perhaps—hungry?’ exclaimed Rana with quick sympathy. And then, remembering that Anselmo was particularly short of money that week, and had none to give away, she added, ‘You shall have what I have earned for polishing the copper. It is very little, but it is all I have—and it will be better than nothing perhaps. Sit down on my stool and rest while I go and get it,’ and she laid her hand on his to lead him to the seat, and then slipped away to the corner where the great cupboard stood.

As the child left him the old man smiled, and said softly to himself—

“‘All she has’”—and she the only one in all the town to give me *anything*! She shall have all *I* have in return.’

Then he bent down and drew from among the folds of his tattered old cloak a metal bowl, tarnished and dirty and much dented, and laid it down among the others on the floor. Then he patted it gently with his old hand, and whispered—

‘Stay with the child and help her.’

When Rana returned she held out to him all her little hoard, and then, because it seemed so little, she offered him her precious coral beads as well. These he would

not take, but the coins he was very glad to have, and, rising with difficulty from the low stool, he shuffled out into the street, saying to her as he went—

‘Old copper pays for the polishing. Rub hard, rub hard, child. Good day to you, and thank you kindly.’

Rana watched him pass slowly down the street, and then went back to her stool, and sat down to finish polishing the bowl she had been at work upon when the old man had interrupted her.

Great was her astonishment to find the shabby old bowl among the others on the floor.

‘What will Anselmo say?’ was her first thought, and then—‘The old man needn’t have left it; I *gave* him the money, I didn’t want anything for it. It *is* a queer old thing,’ and she picked up the bowl to examine it.

Inside she found a little box, made of very hard wood, all stained and shiny with age and use; she tried to open it, but it was impossible; her small hands had not sufficient strength to force it open.

So she slipped it, with her coral beads, into her pocket, and picked up her rag to try what she could do to improve the old bowl.

She rubbed away for some time, but could make very little impression upon the dirt and tarnish, and was much disappointed to find by sunset that she had so little to show for her half-holiday’s hard work. She did not tell Anselmo that night about the old man who had

come into the shop, for she wanted to make the best of the bowl before Anselmo saw it.

She got up early the next morning and rubbed her hardest at the old thing, and to her delight the copper slowly began to gleam through the tarnish, and a wonderful design appeared as the dirt was cleaned away.

‘Oh, but this is a *beautiful* thing, after all,’ exclaimed Rana. ‘I think Anselmo will be very much pleased with it.’ And she was quite right, for Anselmo thought very highly of it when he saw it, and took it out of Rana’s hands to place it in the window. But no sooner had he put it down than it rose up and flew through the air to Rana, and dropped on the floor at her feet.

Anselmo and Rana were both much astonished, and Anselmo picked it up again and put it in another place—this time on a shelf near the door; but once again it flew back and settled down at Rana’s feet.

‘Let me try, Anselmo,’ said Rana; and she picked it up and hung it by its handle on a nail in the wall, giving it a little pat with her hand, and saying—

‘Stay there, stay there.’

And this time it remained where it was put.

While Rana was away at school that morning, more than one person came into the shop to look at the bowl and ask the price of it. And Anselmo, thinking he had got a valuable article, asked a high price for it—too high, indeed, for all except one, a rich merchant who bought

and sold copper goods, and who had always been jealous of poor old Anselmo, and had tried to do him harm on more than one occasion already.

He began to haggle over the price, and Anselmo, knowing what kind of a man he was, gave way, for the sake of peace, and agreed to let him have it for much less than he had at first asked, and went to take it down from its nail; but he found that do what he would he could not move it.

The merchant was very angry, for he thought Anselmo was pretending, and he went to take it down himself, but did not succeed any better, for the bowl would not allow itself to be unhooked from its nail.

At last Anselmo asked the merchant if he would leave it, and let him send the bowl round to his house later in the evening when he had had time to see what could be done with it.

The merchant had perforce to be satisfied with this, and went away in a bad temper, grumbling and talking to himself about "these shopkeepers and their abominably tricky ways."

When Rana came in Anselmo told her what had happened, and bade her take the bowl off the nail and carry it herself to the merchant's house, and leave it there.

Rana obeyed at once, and took the bowl—which made no resistance—to the merchant's house, and left it in the hands of the porter.

But next morning when she went into the shop, there was the bowl hanging as before on its nail.

Anselmo was much put out when he saw it, and scolded Rana for disobeying him, and told her that she must carry it at once to the merchant's house, and apologise for the lateness of its arrival.

In vain Rana explained that she had taken it the night before and left it in the hands of the porter; Anselmo *could* not believe her.

So she set off again, and left it once more with the porter, who looked rather surprised, but only supposed that his master must have ordered a second bowl to match the first.

But when Rana returned home after school, not only was the bowl once more hanging on its nail, but the merchant was in the shop storming away at poor Anselmo, and ordering his servant to flog him for a dishonest villain. In vain Anselmo tried to explain that Rana had taken the bowl herself to his house; the merchant would not believe him. So Rana went straight to the bowl and took it down and held it out to the merchant, asking him if he would not take it away himself, and then he would know that there was no mistake about it.

The merchant stared at Rana in amazement, for he and Anselmo had tried every means in their power to unhook the bowl, and had utterly failed; and now this little girl had quietly taken it down with no effort

at all, and was holding it out to him to carry away himself.

He tried to take it from her, but somehow his hand could *not* grasp it, and at last he flung out of the shop in a towering rage, declaring the thing was bewitched, and he would have his revenge on Anselmo for his insolence.

Anselmo sank down trembling and exhausted in his chair, when the merchant had gone, exclaiming—

“We shall be ruined! we shall be ruined! Oh that this should have happened to me! I that am an honest man. *Ai di me! Ai di me!*”

Rana tried her best to cheer the old man, but it was of no use; he could not bring himself to believe that they would not be ruined. She puzzled her brains to think of something she could do to help him, and at last the idea came into her head that they might hang up a large notice in the window to the effect that any one might come in and try to take down the bowl from its nail for the trifling sum of a few coppers, and he who succeeded should carry away the bowl as a prize.

This was no sooner thought of than done by Rana; and by dinner-time several people had come in to see what the notice meant, and to try their luck; but, needless to say, no one had succeeded in unhooking the bowl.

Soon the whole town knew of Anselmo's new venture, and the money began to pour in, for the news spread to the tourists, and they came in numbers to try to carry off the ‘enchanted bowl.’

Rana took it down every day to polish it, and one morning, after an extra good rubbing on the inside of it, she discovered at the bottom an inset of green jade in the form of a tiny frog.

‘Now, that is wonderful,’ said Rana; ‘for first the bowl was given to me by a stranger, then it refused to leave me, and now I find a picture of a frog in the bottom of it, which is the meaning of my own name!’

Looking at the bottom of the bowl reminded her of the box that had lain in it when she first saw it. She went to her shelf and fetched the little old box and tried to open it once more. But this she still found as impossible to do as other people found the taking away of the bowl; and she put it back again, with a little disappointed shrug of her shoulders, saying—

‘Tiresome thing! What can it be for, shut up tight like that? And there must be something inside, too, because it rattles so when I shake it,’ and she went back and took the bowl down again to look once more at the frog.

Now the merchant, who had tried first to buy the bowl and then to take it, had gone away in a rage from the shop when he found he could not have it,—or rather, that it refused to be his,—and had been thinking about it and planning his revenge all this time. When he found that Anselmo was on his way to become a rich man, in spite of the ill reports he had circulated about him and his ‘dishonest tricky ways,’ he was more angry than

ever. Then he formed a plan to carry off Rana herself with the enchanted bowl, as the two seemed to be inseparable, and it was impossible to take the one without the other. Then he meant to exhibit them in his own grand shop, charging a great deal more to those who came to try to carry off the bowl than Anselmo had done, and so ruin Anselmo, and gain his riches for himself.

So this morning he had hidden himself, and watched unseen till Rana came and took down the bowl from its nail to look again at the frog inside ; and then, creeping up behind her, he threw a great cloak over her and the bowl together, and carried them off, as he thought, to his own shop.

There he had had a portion curtained off, and a great gilt hook fastened in the wall above a green velvet chair, for his exhibition. He put a large notice-board in the window, on which was printed in green and gold letters :—

GOOD PEOPLE, ALL COME IN AND SEE THE ONLY REAL ENCHANTRESS AND HER WONDERFUL BOWL

Then he hoped that his grand shop, and the notice

in green and gold letters, would attract many more people than Anselmo had had in his poor little place.

He had also had a gorgeous dress made for Rana to wear, of green satin, all spangled over with sequins and imitation diamonds, and a gilt circlet with green stones in it for her head.

When he arrived at his shop he was tired and hot with carrying the heavy load so far; and grumbling at its great weight, and mopping his hot face with a red pocket handkerchief, he drew off the cloak that he had thrown over Rana, and bade her be quick and change her dress, or he would beat her for a lazy useless thing. But instead of Rana there stood before him only a long-legged stork, dangling in its beak a small brown basket with a closed lid.

The merchant was first startled, then terrified, and then furious that he should have been so 'tricked' once more. He seized the first thing he could find,—which happened to be a heavy pair of tongs,—and rushed at the stork to kill it. But the huge bird spread its wings and rose above him, and opening its beak to peck at him, dropped the little brown basket. As this fell the lid opened, and out flew thousands and thousands of stinging insects, which set upon the merchant and stung his face and neck and hands and ankles, till he was beside himself with pain and irritation.

Meanwhile two boys, attracted by the notice in the

window, had opened the door, and the stork flew out, and away over the roofs of the houses.

The boys, after peeping into the curtained recess prepared for Rana, and getting a few bad stings on their faces, ran away and told every one they met about the notice in the merchant's shop window, and warned them against going even as far as the door, for there was no 'Enchantress' there, and nothing but a swarm of venomous insects, which had already nearly killed the merchant himself.

All this time Rana was quietly at home dusting the furniture, and showing the bowl to the sight-seers who came in to try to carry it off. She wondered to herself why the merchant had rushed in and out of the shop that morning, flicking his cloak about in such a hurry, and without speaking a word. She did not know that he thought he had carried her off in his arms. Neither did she know that while she possessed the bowl she could not be carried away, any more than the bowl could be taken from its nail by any one but Rana herself.

As the people came in and out they spoke of what had happened to the wicked merchant, and of how miserable he was now, and how no one would go near him or his shop for fear of being stung.

Rana listened, and the more she heard of his sufferings, the more indignant she became that no one would go near him.

She was planning to talk to Anselmo about it, and

see whether there was any way in which they could help him—for she did not know of *all* the harm he had tried to do to poor Anselmo—when a grand carriage drew up at the shop door, and Rana saw, to her great delight, the fair-haired child of the travelling carriage, of whom she had so often thought, stepping out of it.

Her father was with her, and as he helped her to alight, he said to her—

‘Now, Adèle, this is the shop, and no doubt this little girl is Rana. She will show you the bowl while I talk to the old man.’

Rana still wore the old velvet dress, and as she stood at the door of the shop, Adèle recognised her, and began to talk to her about the wonderful bowl, and Rana took it down to show her the little green frog at the bottom; and then she went on to tell her of the old box which she couldn’t open, and the two children went together to the far corner to look at it.

Adèle held it in her hand, and turned it about this way and that, and shook it to hear the ‘something inside’ rattle, but could not make it open. And then—because she had nearly always had everything she wanted without trouble—she frowned, stamped her foot, and said—

‘It *must* be opened. I want to see what is inside,’ and running to her father, she exclaimed—

‘Father, Rana says this box has never been opened since she had it, and I want to see what is inside. Please open it for me.’

Her father took it from her and tried his best to open it, and then asked Anselmo about it. But he declared that it was not his, and that he had never seen it before.

Rana explained that it had come in the bowl, but she had put it away as she could not open it.

‘I *must* see inside,’ said Adèle impatiently.

Her father tried again and again without success, and at last Anselmo said—

‘We will break it open for the little lady,’ and he fetched a heavy hammer and a chisel; but the box was so hard and slippery that the chisel could not be held in place on it, and each blow of the hammer fell on the table or on the floor, but never on the smooth box.

Anselmo was in despair, and Adèle cross and impatient, and at last her father, to sooth her, offered to buy it and see what they could do elsewhere to get the box opened.

Anselmo was ready to give it away, but Adèle said—

‘No, it is Rana’s box, and she must have the money for it.’ But Rana would not take anything for it, and gave it her as a present. Adèle drove away, once more smiling happily at Rana, who smiled back again, feeling glad that if any one was to have the old box it should be Adèle, though she was sorry to part with it, especially before she had seen what was inside it.

Next day the grand carriage appeared again at the shop door, and Adèle came running in, calling out—

‘Rana! Rana! see here; there is your own name on the box! We found it after the blacksmith had been trying to prize it open. He must have managed to scratch some of the surface off it somehow or other. And ever since then I have not been able to keep still or do my lessons or anything, for I can see nothing in my books but the words, “I am Rana’s, take me back,” and my pen will write nothing else, and the notes on the piano seem to sing the words too, whatever piece I try to play. So I *had* to bring the box back, you see.’

Rana, who was delighted to see Adèle, and really rather glad to have the old box back again, too, was much interested to see her name written on it. She slipped it into her pocket, and Adèle tripped away again, telling her to be sure and let her know if ever she managed to open the box.

In the evening, after Anselmo had put the shutters up for the night, she begged him to take her round to see how the poor merchant was getting on all alone.

When they got to his shop they heard groans, and saw the poor man lying in a heap on the floor calling for some one to bring him some cold water to cool his face, which was swollen and purple with the stings of the insects.

Anselmo did not want Rana to go in, but she said, ‘I must just take him some water,’ and she picked up a

mug that was just inside the shop door, and filled it with water from the fountain near, and then went in to the merchant.

The air was thick with the insects, and they buzzed about the merchant's head trying to find a new place in which to sting him.

Rana sat down on the floor by his side, and drew her handkerchief out of her pocket, to dip it in the water and lay it on his face. As she did so the old box fell out on to the floor, and to Rana's delight and astonishment the lid sprang open of its own accord.

Inside the box lay a tiny pill-box, and a necklace of wonderful green stones with a tiny frog cut in the face of each one.

In the pill-box was some salve, and on the lid directions for use for the cure of burns and stings and most other troubles.

Rana at once took this up to offer it to the merchant to ease his pain; but he had seen the glitter of the green stones of the necklace, and was stealthily stretching out his hand to seize them, when suddenly he saw them—to his rage and disappointment—fly up and clasp themselves round Rana's neck, where they lay sparkling and twinkling at him.

He scowled at Rana and raised his hand to strike her, but the green stones flashed angrily, and shot out long rays like sharp spikes, so that he could not get near her, and he drew back in terror. The insects

buzzed closer round his face, and he called again for water.

Then Rana gave him her cool wet handkerchief, and showed him the little pill-box. He tried to snatch this out of her hand, but before she would let him have it she made him promise that he would never try to harm Anselmo again; and so eager was he for anything that would soothe the burning pain of the stings, that he gave his promise at once.

Though, if it had not been that the salve was fairy stuff, he would just as readily have broken that promise—if it had pleased him to do so at any future time.

With the first touch of the salve on his skin the pain began to lessen, and the hum of the insects grew fainter and fainter as they flew away, and finally disappeared. Then the merchant began to regret his promise, and to long for the riches that were falling to Anselmo's lot; so he tried to keep Rana prisoner so that she should act as his 'Enchantress' with her bowl. But the minute he put out his hand to take hold of her there was a sound of humming and buzzing in the air, and the little pill-box flew back into the old wooden box, which shut with a snap; and so terrified was he at the thought of the return of the insects, that he promised again and again never to try to harm either Rana or Anselmo; and to show that he really meant what he said this time, he took in the notice-board from the window, and tore down the curtains of the recess and removed the velvet

chair. He even offered to give Rana the green satin dress as a present, but this she refused, as being much too gaudy for her to wear.

Then Rana went home with Anselmo, and they lived happily and safely together for many years. And all the money that came to Rana through the bowl she gave to Anselmo, and thus was able to make him happy and comfortable for the rest of his life, and to repay him to a certain extent for his goodness to her.

Adèle was so charmed with the necklace when she saw it, that her father had one made for her as nearly like it as he could, only that the stones were pale blue aquamarines instead of green emeralds, and there were little flowers engraved on them instead of frogs.

The wicked merchant was sometimes to be seen slinking along the narrow street at sunset, and peering with greedy eyes at Anselmo's 'pokey little shop,' which was now succeeding so much better than his own grand place; and though he still longed with all his might for revenge, he never was able to harm Anselmo and Rana, protected as they were by the necklace and the Enchanted Bowl.

THE ONE WHITE ROSE

ONCE in the far-away days of fairies, there was a kingdom where no one had ever seen or heard of a white flower of any kind. Not that there were no flowers growing there at all, for there were masses and masses of them everywhere, but they were all coloured, and no one had ever dreamed of such a thing as a white flower, any more than they had thought that the grass might come up blue or purple instead of green.

The Princess Yvonne lived with her father and mother in a wonderful white marble palace, which stood in the midst of a garden more splendid than any other in the kingdom.

This garden the King had given to the Princess for her own, that she might wander about in it whenever she liked, and the fame of its beauty spread all over the country. There were great trees in this garden, making cool shady places where the Princess could walk or sit in the heat of the day; many-coloured flowers filled the sunny borders, and gorgeous flowering creepers

covered the garden walls, and hung in clusters and wreaths from the balconies of the white palace. There were sparkling fountains, and little lakes whose blue waters glimmered through the trees and glistened like silver in the sunlight.

For fourteen years the Princess had been perfectly happy, for she had never happened to wish for anything that she could not have.

But alas ! one day everything was changed. She was wandering slowly down one of the shady grass walks in the garden, swinging a basket full of pink and deep red roses in her hand as she went, and saying to herself—

‘ My garden is perfect ! more perfect than any other. My garden is perfect—is *perfect*——’

She came to an opening in the trees, through which could be seen one of the little lakes, and she stood still for a moment, gazing at something that seemed to be moving over the water ; and then, running forward, she saw more clearly a tiny figure, so slight in its filmy blue draperies, that at times it seemed almost to disappear in the shadows cast by the great trees that stood round the lake.

It skimmed over the surface of the water with its gauzy wings,—like those of a great dragon-fly,—and, as it flew, it made a humming sound ; and by and by the Princess thought she could hear a word or two running through the humming, though she could not tell what they meant.

She stood at the edge of the water listening and thinking to herself—

‘Oh! I must, at last, have found a real fairy! This is the very best thing that has ever happened. Oh, I *am* happy, I *am* happy!’

‘H-m-m, h-m-m-m—no—garden——’ she heard;
‘h-m-m—white—rose—h-m-m-m——’¹

Then, feeling very much puzzled, the Princess spoke softly to the fairy—

‘A *white* rose?’ she said. ‘I have never heard of or seen a white rose. Pink and red and yellow roses of all sorts, but never a white one. Do tell me about it.’

And the fairy hovered near to her and hummed—

‘H-m-m—no garden—h-m-m—is perfect—h-m-m—without a white rose—h-m-m’; and then she flew away, and was really lost in the shadows this time.

A troubled look came over the face of the Princess, and she raised her hand to brush back the hair from her forehead, and began to wonder to herself aloud—

‘I thought my garden was quite perfect—but it is true there are no white roses in it, and no white flowers of any kind. I wonder why that is? I never thought of it before. Oh, I want my garden to be *quite* perfect. I will ask my father to give me some white roses.’

When she reached the palace she went straight to the King and said to him—

¹ The words of the fairy are intended to be hummed in monotone, or sung in recitative.

‘Father, there are no white roses in my garden ; can I not have some? This morning I thought my garden was perfect, and I was so happy, but now I know it cannot be so. Father, give me white roses—give me white roses!’

The King looked at his daughter’s face, and saw a little wistful look there for the first time, which was almost a look of sadness.

He drew her on to his knee, and promised to do his best to get some white rose-bushes to plant in the garden ; but he did not tell her that he himself had never seen a white flower of any kind, and did not know there was such a thing.

He consulted with his counsellors, and all the great gardeners and wise men in his kingdom, but they—though they pretended to be very wise and clever—really knew no more than he did, and did not even know how to set about finding a white rose.

Meanwhile the Princess waited and waited. She did not care to go into her garden since it was no longer ‘perfect,’ and she sat all day in the palace waiting, till the beautiful colour faded from her cheeks for want of the open-air life she had grown so much accustomed to.

She sat with her hands in her lap and her head bent forward a little, as though listening ; and when any one entered the room, she would look up and ask if there were any white roses growing in the garden yet, and she would talk of nothing else.

The courtiers, as they passed her door, or stood under her open window, could hear her repeating over and over again—

‘White roses to make my garden perfect—when will they come? *when* will they come?’ and then she would sit silent listening for a few minutes, and then begin again.

The King and Queen grew distracted with anxiety; they tried everything they could think of, even to having roses made of white silk and white velvet, delicately scented; but the Princess would not have them near her, after the first glance at them which showed her they were not the real thing.

They had a room repainted for her, with white roses on the walls and raised white roses on the ceiling; they scented her bath with rose water, and they had cream ices made in the form of a rose; but nothing satisfied her, and she only said—

‘These do not make my garden perfect.’

The King, at last, offered a big reward to any one who could procure a white rose-bush and succeed in making it bloom in the Princess’s garden; and many brought bushes which they declared would produce white roses, but when the flowers came they were merely pale pink or pale yellow, but never pure white.

One brilliant moonlight night a big bumble-bee was buzzing and humming outside the open window of the Princess Yvonne’s room; and the sound reminded her



"White roses +++ when will they come?"

of that the fairy had made as she skimmed over the surface of the lake, and hummed those words about the white rose.

‘My fairy!’ exclaimed the Princess, and she slipped out of bed and went towards the window, from where she could see part of the lake gleaming in the moonlight through the trees.

‘Ah! there is something moving! my fairy! I see her, and she is coming to me!’ cried the Princess.

And soon the fairy was hovering on her gauzy wings close to the Princess, and she heard the low humming sound as before, and listened intently for the words. This time she heard them more easily, and understood them more quickly—

‘H-m-m—no garden—h-m-m-m—is perfect—h-m-m—without—white roses—h-m-m-m-m—each one h-m-m—must find—and tend—h-m-m-m—her own—h-m-m-m.’

And then, to the Princess’s surprise, she saw the fairy fly in through the window and alight on the floor just where the moonlight was brightest. And then her beautiful gauzy wings fell from her shoulders and faded away, and the fairy slipped into the Princess’s bed, and hummed herself to sleep.

The Princess looked at her, and thought—

‘No one would know it was not me—the Princess Yvonne—sleeping there; she is exactly like me now, and she has grown so much taller, too, all in a minute.’

While the Princess had been watching the fairy she had begun mechanically to dress herself, and now she found herself standing again at the window, with the last words of the fairy still humming in her ears—

‘H-m-m—each one—h-m-m-m—must find—h-m-m h-m-m and tend—h-m-m—h-m-m her own——’

‘Then I must set off at once,’ she said, ‘and find my own white rose-bush while the fairy takes my place,’ and she stepped on to the balcony, and ran down a long flight of marble steps into the garden—her garden that was not yet perfect.

As she went down the path the flowers were sleeping, but when she neared the gate, one deep yellow rose, hanging low from a wooden arch, brushed against her cheek, and she kissed it and said good-bye.

The Princess walked straight on, neither turning to right nor left, until sunrise; and then she turned into a hay-field and rested till the peasants came to their work, and she was able to begin to ask if any one could tell her where white roses were to be found.

‘No,’ they all answered, ‘we never heard tell of a *white* rose.’ Then one of them gave her some milk to drink, and another an apple to eat; and so she went on, asking every one she met the same question, and always receiving the same answer, till she came to the sea-shore; and there she saw a fishing-boat just ready to start away. She asked the fisherman if he could tell her where white roses were to be found. And he said



She kissed the rose and said "good-bye."



he had once heard of a garden—from a sailor who had been shipwrecked and washed ashore in this very bay—where there *might* have been white roses for all he knew, for he spoke of so many flowers that the fisherman knew nothing about, and it seemed to have been a very wonderful garden. But when the Princess Yvonne asked where that garden was, the fisherman shook his head and said he did not know, it was so many years ago, and he had never seen the sailor again. He offered her a seat in his boat if she liked to go across the sea to an island he knew, and which he would pass on his way out that morning; she might look for white roses there perhaps. And as the fisherman was the only one of all those she had asked who had not actually said that he had *never* heard of such a thing as a white rose, she stepped into his boat and sailed out to sea.

When they had gone some distance the wind changed, and blew so strongly that the fisherman was unable to reach the island he was making for, and his boat was driven out of its course before the wind, towards another small island he did not remember to have seen before, and the boat was aground on the beach in a few minutes; and then he had to wait for the tide to turn and the wind to go down before he could leave again.

The Princess climbed out of the boat, and thanking the fisherman for having brought her so far on her way, said good-bye to him, and set off once more on foot to

look for her roses ; for, as every place outside the palace garden was new to her, it seemed just as likely that white roses would be to be found here as anywhere else.

She climbed up the rocky shore, and came to a wide stretch of down with a few small trees dotted about,—bent all one way with the force of the winds,—and beyond that a high wall enclosing some large place.

The Princess Yvonne made straight for this wall, and walked round it a long way, looking for a gate.

It was some time before she found any opening, but when she did she was fully rewarded for her long search, for through a high wrought-iron gate—fast closed—she saw a garden where white roses grew in profusion, amongst endless numbers of other flowers of every colour and size and shape, and she said softly—

‘ This garden is more perfect than mine.’

Standing among the flowers was a lady—tall and fair, and with wonderful shining eyes ; and when the Princess saw her, she asked through the bars of the gate—

‘ May I come in ? and may I have some of those white roses ? I have come a long way alone to find them, and I want to take home a bush to plant in my garden, to make it as perfect as yours is.’

The lady came close to the gate, but she did not offer to open it, nor did she ask the Princess to come inside. She smiled, and looked straight down into her eyes, and said—

‘ First, you must learn the care of them, and what

they need, before you can transplant white roses into your garden. Are you willing to learn?’

The Princess so longed to possess the flowers for her garden that she was ready to promise at once; and then the lady opened the gate and passed through it, closing it after her. The Princess felt a chill of disappointment pass over her as the gate shut behind the lady, leaving them outside, and she asked—

‘Am I not to go into the garden to learn how to tend the roses?’

‘No,’ said the lady, ‘there is very much for you to learn before you could enter there’; and she led the Princess to another garden outside the wall, where the ground was divided into small brown patches, where there were no flowers, and where there were only what looked like some little bare sticks standing at intervals in the beds, and a good many weeds.

The Princess was just going to exclaim at the dulness of this place, and turned to look up at the lady by her side, but when she saw the look in those wonderful eyes she said nothing, and silently followed the lady to a small wooden shed that stood at one side of the garden next the high wall.

There in one corner stood a set of garden tools and a watering-can, and on a wooden seat lay a small book.

‘Here you must stay and work and learn,’ said the lady; ‘everything needful for your work is here, and

through this door is your sleeping and living room.' Then the lady opened a door at the back of the shed, and the Princess saw a little room with a small white bed in it, and a table and one chair. It was a rough little place, built against the high wall of the other garden, and it had one little window at one end, from which nothing but the bare brown garden beds with the little sticks in them could be seen.

The Princess stepped into this little room for a moment to look round it, and when she came back into the shed the lady was no longer there, neither was she to be seen anywhere in the small garden.

The Princess felt 'left' and lonely for a moment, and said aloud—

'But how am I to learn all by myself, I wonder? I have never done any real gardening.' Then she thought of the book lying on the bench by the tools, and took it up. She turned over the leaves, but it was written in a language she did not understand, and she laid it down again as useless to her.

Then she examined the tools one by one—

'To begin with, I'll try the spade,' she said; and taking it up, she chose a bit of smooth ground near the shed, and dug it over till her back and limbs ached badly, and she went to sit down on the bench for a little.

'Dear me,' she said as she looked over the garden, 'is that rough bit the piece I have been working on?'

and she jumped up and took the rake and tried to smooth over the earth again with it ; but, though she broke up the rough lumps, she made curious hills and valleys with the rake, and it looked a very clumsy piece of work when finished. She was so tired out by this time that she put away the tools and went into her little room to go to bed.

And there on the table, waiting for her, she found a supper of bread and honey, and milk, and fruit daintily set out for her. She sat down on the one chair and enjoyed the meal thoroughly before going to bed, and in the morning when she woke she found her breakfast waiting for her in the same way.

Every day she worked hard until she had learnt how to use all the tools, and had dug and weeded and raked all the beds thoroughly, leaving the dry sticks standing where she first found them, as she did not know why they had been placed there. And then, puzzled to know what to do next, she once more turned over the pages of the little book, and found to her surprise that there were a few sentences that she could read now, though they did not help her very much. She went to bed, and fell asleep, and dreamed that the wall of the other garden, against which her bed stood, was gone, and that she could see plainly the white roses that she so longed to be able to grow in her own garden.

Then she watched while the gardener tended them, and did her best to remember afterwards what she had

seen in her dream, and to realise where she had failed in her own garden.

Next morning she was eager to start work, and went out directly after her breakfast to begin; but stopped short as she looked at her bare garden, and said—

‘ But, of course, there were the rose-bushes themselves to attend to in the other garden, and here there are none. I don’t see what I am to do now at all.’ And then, for the first time, she felt hopeless and dreadfully disappointed, till suddenly she thought—

‘ The bare sticks ! I’ll pretend they are rose-bushes ’ ; and pretend she did the whole day long.

Next morning when she looked out of her window she saw it had been raining in the night, and the bare sticks had a greenish tinge on them. She ran out to look closer at them, and found they were actually beginning to show signs of coming out into bud.

And in a day or two, between the soft rain in the night and the warm sun in the day, all the bare sticks had grown into small bushes, and the Princess Yvonne was watching eagerly each tiny flower-bud, hoping—hoping so intensely that one, at least, of the bushes should prove to be a *white* rose-bush.

There were one or two plants which were much better than the others, and the Princess took great pride in these ; but there was one that stood in a corner that never seemed to prosper, though she took more pains with that one than with all the others, trying her best to

get it to improve and become equal to the rest. It had only one tiny flower-bud, and the Princess was afraid that even that one might never open.

After the warm sunshine and the rain there came a day of bitter cold wind, and the rose-bushes shivered and drooped. The Princess was troubled, not knowing what to do for them, and wishing she could protect them from the cold ; and when night came, she could not make up her mind to leave them and go to bed. At last, after wandering up and down and in and out of the little paths of the garden for some time, she thought—

‘If I could only cover them, or put up a screen on the wind side, they might be saved ; but I have nothing but the one blanket on my bed, which, I suppose, I must not tear up, as it does not belong to me. It would only shelter one bush as it is, but it would be better to save *one* than to lose all. But, oh dear ! *which* shall I choose ?’

Hastily she collected some short sticks, and fetched the blanket off her bed ; and then, looking once more at each bush, she finally chose the one at the corner where the wind blew strongest, ‘because,’ as she said, ‘it is the smallest and weakest.’ She planted the sticks firmly in the ground, and fastened the blanket on to them, making a screen on the wind side to shelter the little weak bush. Then she went back to her little room, and lay down on the mattress, trying to pretend that she did not feel very cold without her blanket.

In the morning she scarcely dared to look into the

garden for fear of what she might see there, though she knew the wind had dropped, and it was once more warm and fine ; and she kept her face turned away from the little window till she was ready to go out.

But when she opened the door and came out through the shed she could hardly believe her eyes, for there, in the warm sunshine, every bush was covered with rose-buds just opening ; and she ran from one to the other searching for a pure white flower.

She looked first at the finest bushes, in which she had taken so much pride, but there were no white roses there. It is true there were many delicate shades of pink or yellow amongst them, and most perfect shapes, but not one rose was white.

Then she turned to the poor little shabby bush that she had tried to protect from the cold wind the night before, fearing to find it quite dead this morning, but its leaves were still green, and indeed they looked fresher and greener than ever before ; and the bud—the tiny bud had opened, and it was a pure white rose.

The Princess bent down and kissed it, and as she rose again, there stood the lady of the other garden close beside her, and the wonderful eyes looked straight down into hers and smiled.

And the Princess thought—

‘ Oh ! I want to give her something for all she has helped me to do. It must be—the best thing I have got——’ and her eyes wandered over the rose-beds, and

back to the ring on her finger, and then down to her one white rose—

‘My *best* thing,’ she said to herself, and bent down to gather the flower to give to the lady of the other garden. As she broke the stalk there was a sound of humming, and the Princess looked up quickly to find herself no longer in the small garden where she had learned so much, but once more back in her own garden early in the morning, holding in one hand the little book, and in the other her one white rose.

But as she looked round her garden, she saw, everywhere, amongst the brilliant flowers in the borders and the creepers on the walls, clusters of white roses.

She stood lost in amazement; and then down the flight of marble steps flitted the fairy, humming as she went—

‘H-m-m—each one—h-m-m-m must—find—h-m-m and tend—h-m-m h-m-m—her own—h-m-m white rose—h-m-m—to make—h-m-m-m-m—her garden—h-m-m—perfect—h-m-m——’

‘I wonder,’ thought the Princess, ‘if I was working in some out-of-the-way part of my own garden all the time and did not know it?’

‘H-m-m—h-m-m—and did not—h-m-m—h-m-m—know it—h-m-m-m——’ hummed the fairy.

‘Oh!’ exclaimed the Princess, ‘I *said* it was the best thing that had ever happened when I found *you*, my fairy. You showed me a perfect garden, and have

helped me to find my white rose. And it is you who have filled my garden with white flowers and made it perfect for me.'

'H-m-m—h-m-m—h-m-m——' hummed the fairy, as she flitted away through the trees to the little lake.

THE LITTLE HOUSE OF DRIFT-WOOD

THREE little fairies—Shell-pink, Sea-green, and Pearl-grey—were tired of playing on the seashore and making tiny sand-houses, and thought they would like much better to build themselves each a house big enough to live in.

So they settled to go to a quiet little bay farther along the shore, where no fairy houses had yet been built.

Shell-pink and Sea-green flew off in a great hurry, both wanting to be first, and to choose the nicest shells to build with. They both wore short gauze dresses, one of pink and the other of green, and their little wings matched their dresses, and were transparent and shining like those of a dragon-fly, though short and round like a butterfly's.

Shell-pink, in her hurry, dropped one of her tiny pink slippers, and called back over her shoulder to Pearl-grey, who was following slowly, to ask her to pick it up for her, as she had no time to stop. She arrived

at the bay a moment or two before Sea-green, and seeing some delicate pale pink shells, at once decided to build her house of them, for pink was her colour, and they were so particularly pretty, she thought.

Sea-green, coming up directly after, said crossly—

‘I suppose you’ve got the best; you always do. I never get first choice.’ And she fluffed out her pale green gauzy skirts and fluttered her wings in a pet.

Shell-pink said nothing, for she soon saw her busily at work collecting some oyster-shells, whose mother-o’-pearl lining shone sometimes pink and sometimes green or white in the sunlight, and were almost as pretty as Shell-pink’s shells, and Shell-pink thought to herself that Sea-green need not have been so cross with her after all.

When Pearl-grey arrived, bringing the little pink slipper with her, Sea-green called to her—

‘What a long time you have been! Shell-pink and I have chosen the shells for our houses. Mine are much the best, are they not? You might come and help me to collect some more, will you? they are so heavy, and there’s plenty of time for you to build your house afterwards.’

Pearl-grey stood a moment looking at the shells, and then Shell-pink ran up to her to take her slipper and thank her for bringing it to her.

‘Come and look at my house, Pearl-grey,’ she said; ‘I *do* love building! and haven’t I chosen a beautiful

place for it in the middle of the sunshine, away from the shadow of the big rock?’

Pearl-grey went with Shell-pink to look at her house, and thought how pretty the colour of the shells was as the light shone through them.

‘But what are you going to build your house with?’ asked Shell-pink. And Sea-green, vexed with Pearl-grey for going with Shell-pink to look at her house instead of at once helping *her* to collect oyster-shells, said huffily—

‘There’s some drift-wood there for Pearl-grey. It will do quite well enough for her. It is just the colour of her dull dress.’

Pearl-grey’s dress was all of soft grey, and long to the ground. Her wings were of pale grey feathers outside, and were lined with white ones; and they were long and pointed like those of a swallow, instead of being short and round like the gauzy ones of the other two little fairies.

She felt rather disappointed when she found there was nothing left for her to build with except the dull-looking drift-wood, and the colour rose in her cheeks at Sea-green’s unkind speech.

The drift-wood lay scattered over the shore, and as she carried it to the place where she meant to build her house, she managed to carry a few oyster-shells for Sea-green as well, for which, however, she hardly got a ‘thank you.’

88 LITTLE HOUSE OF DRIFT-WOOD

Shell-pink finished her building first, and then she found some feathery pink seaweed which she spread on the floor of her little house for a carpet, and made a border of tiny white stones set close together all round it. She picked up a number of soft white feathers too, that had fallen from the breast of a sea-gull, and piling them together in one corner, she made a lovely couch with them; 'fit for a Princess,' as she said to herself with pride.

When Sea-green had placed the last oyster-shell on the roof of her house, she stood and admired it, as the sun shone on the mother-o'-pearl and brought out the lovely pinks and greens.

She called to the others to come and admire too, 'for it is quite the loveliest house of all, isn't it?' she said. They both agreed with her that it was very lovely, but as they turned away again, Shell-pink whispered to Pearl-grey—

'It is very dark inside Sea-green's house, and when I peeped inside I thought the walls were very rough; didn't you?'

Now Sea-green had also thought her house was very dark, though she would not have said so for anything, nor could she have borne to hear any one else say so; and she went down the shore to look for something to brighten it up. She soon found some bits of broken glass—green and white—lying on the shore, and sparkling in the sunlight. These she carried into her dark

little house, and set them round the walls like a wainscot ; but the sun could not reach them there to make them sparkle ; and when Sea-green saw them looking so dull, she was bitterly disappointed, and went and gathered some feathery green seaweed, and hung a thick curtain of it over the door that no one might see inside.

Meanwhile Pearl-grey had been building steadily, and had now finished her plain little house. Some of the pieces of drift-wood were coloured yellow, and some white, on one side, and she put the coloured side inside to brighten it up a little. She had made two windows to let in light and air, and a wide doorway ; and in one corner she had fixed in the sandy floor a large deep white shell, and filled it with fresh water from a little stream that ran into the sea not far off.

Pearl-grey's house was the largest of the three ; it was lighter than Sea-green's, but plainer than Shell-pink's ; and Sea-green did not admire it at all, and did not hesitate to say so.

Even Shell-pink could not say much about it, for she did not think it was pretty.

When all the building was finished, Shell-pink lay down to rest on her soft feather couch ; Sea-green made a seat of sand outside her curtained doorway, and sat down to comb out her hair, and straighten her dress and her wings ; and Pearl-grey stood looking out across the sands, and watching the figure of an old man

carrying a heavy bundle, and coming slowly towards them.

When the old man (fairies are not all young, there are some quite old ones) reached Shell-pink's house, he stood at the door and asked her humbly if he might put down his bundle inside her house, and leave it till he came back again from the fairy village; it was so heavy, he said, and he was very tired.

Shell-pink was nearly asleep, and was startled when she heard the old man's voice at her door. Jumping up, she looked at him, and said—

'Who are you? Oh no, I can't have a great ugly bundle lying in my pretty new house. Do go away, please.'

So the old man went on to where Sea-green was sitting outside her house, and asked her if she would take care of his bundle for him.

But Sea-green looked him up and down, and drew in her delicate pale green skirts, and said sharply—

'Don't come near me, dirty old man. I don't know what you mean by asking me to take care of your bundle. Go away! go *away*!'

The old man shrugged his shoulders and turned away wearily, and when he came to Pearl-grey's little house he hardly liked to ask again for fear he should be refused, and would have passed by had not Pearl-grey called to him, and said—

'My house is ugly, I know, but you are very

welcome to come in and rest if you are tired ; and there is plenty of room for your bundle if you like to leave it for a while.'

So the old man laid down his bundle, gratefully, inside Pearl-grey's house, and after a drink of fresh water from the big white shell, he went on his way towards the fairy village.

As he disappeared, Sea-green called to Pearl-grey, and said—

'I wouldn't be you to have a dirty-looking thing like that in my new house! you don't know *what* may be inside it'; and Pearl-grey's cheeks flushed pink as she answered—

'My house is not pretty like yours and Shell-pink's, so a bundle won't hurt it, and there is plenty of room in it—and he looked *so* tired—and——' but she said no more, for she saw that Sea-green was not listening.

Shell-pink went back to her feather couch, saying nothing, but feeling just a tiny bit uncomfortable, and trying to make out to herself that Pearl-grey's plain little house was a much more suitable place for bundles than her own dainty little dwelling, and that really Pearl-grey probably quite liked having them.

Many times after that Pearl-grey took charge of bundles and boxes of all sorts and sizes for tired travellers, till, as Sea-green said with a sniff—

'Your house is nothing but a lumber-room for rubbish. *I* wouldn't live in such a messy place.'

One evening the wind got up, and the waves rose high, and the little fairies were frightened at the storm.

Shell-pink covered herself up entirely with the feathers of her couch; Sea-green cowered down in the darkest corner of her little house, with the seaweed curtain drawn closely across the doorway; and Pearl-grey stood inside her house looking out through one of the windows. She watched a boat tossing about on the rough sea for some time, till, at last, it ran aground on the beach, and the one fisherman in it climbed out and came slowly up the shore to the three houses.

First he went to Shell-pink's to ask for shelter from the storm, but she had buried her head so deep in the feathers that she did not hear him speak; then he went to Sea-green's house, but the noise of the wind and the waves was so great that she mistook his voice for the cry of a sea-gull, and took no notice.

Then Pearl-grey, who had seen him come up the beach from his boat, stood at her door, and—remembering what Sea-green had said of her house, and how *she* 'would not live in such a messy place'—said timidly—

'If you would not mind just a lumber-room, will you shelter in my house till the storm is over?' and as he came in, she added, 'It is rather dark, I am afraid; I have no lamp, and there are a great many bundles about.'

Then suddenly the wind dropped, and the moon came out and filled the house with light. And then, to

Pearl-grey's surprise and delight, she saw every ugly bundle and box fly open ; and out from one came a carpet, which unrolled and spread itself flat on the floor ; from another came silken curtains, which hung themselves at the windows and on either side of the door ; from others came slender-legged tables and chairs and a sofa, which placed themselves round the room ; and last of all a silver tray slid on to the middle table, filled with fairy food of all kinds, and nectar, in long lily-shaped glasses, to drink.

Pearl-grey looked round in wonder at the change in her little house, and was just going to ask her visitor to sit down and have something to eat and drink from the tray, when she saw that, instead of a shipwrecked fisherman, there stood before her the King of the Fairies in his fairy dress and golden crown, and she dropped down on one knee, not knowing in her flurry what else to do.

Then the King of the Fairies laughed, and said—

‘Tis a most wonderful kind of lumber in your house, Pearl-grey, very fresh and pretty ; and I do not find it very dark with the moon shining in on your golden walls!’

‘Golden walls!’ she thought to herself, ‘no, surely it is only yellow paint?’ But the yellow paint *had* turned to gold.

Then Pearl-grey, too shy to speak, and wishing so much that Shell-pink and Sea-green would come in and help her, tremblingly offered the King some of the

dainty little dishes on the tray, and he sat down on the prettiest chair while she waited on him.

It was not long before a train of fairies came flying through the air looking for their King, whom they had missed, and the sound of their voices and the beat of their wings in the air roused Shell-pink and Sea-green, in the silence after the storm, and they came out just as the King and his escort vanished, and ran to Pearl-grey's house to ask what the voices were that they had heard.

But when they came to the door of the little drift-wood house and looked in, they could hardly believe their eyes.

Shell-pink spoke first, as she danced in, exclaiming in great excitement—

‘Pearl-grey, *where* did all these lovely things come from? how long have you had them? and why didn't you tell us?’ and she fluttered about and examined everything, from the thick soft carpet and the furniture to the little dishes on the tray, and before Pearl-grey could answer all her questions Sea-green came in, and asked—

‘What have you done with all those dirty old bundles? How angry all the people will be when they come for them again, and find that you have turned into a fine lady, and all their belongings have vanished!’

Pearl-grey stood close to Shell-pink, and slipped her hand into hers, as she said—

'These things *are* the bundles—I mean—I mean—they came out of the bundles. I saw them when the King of the Fairies was here.'

'The King of the Fairies *here?*—*when?*' exclaimed Shell-pink and Sea-green together. 'Why didn't you call *us?*'

'He went first to your houses,' explained Pearl-grey, 'but I suppose you didn't hear him. And I was sorry, for your houses are both much——'

'*Were* much prettier than yours, you mean,' said Shell-pink, munching a fairy sweet from the tray.

'It's my belief you knew what was in the bundles when you took them in,' said Sea-green spitefully, as she looked round at everything; 'and you *pretended* the yellow and white on the driftwood was only paint, and turned it inside to hide it, when all the time it was real gold and silver! I hate cheats!' And she flounced out of the little house, refusing to touch the sweets that Pearl-grey was handing to her, though she was longing to taste them all the time.

'You *didn't* know, I am sure, Pearl-grey,' said Shell-pink, kissing her. 'Never mind what Sea-green says, she's cross because the inside of her house is not all gold and silver too.' And, after a moment, she added wistfully, 'I wish *I'd* taken in a bundle and got something nice out of it.'

The next day Shell-pink stood at her door on the watch for a traveller with a bundle.

Soon she saw an old woman coming along, carrying something large and heavy under her shawl.

Shell-pink called to her, and told her she could put her bundle down just inside her house, as Pearl-grey had had her share of them by now.

The old woman seemed only too pleased to lay down her load, and Shell-pink was so much taken up with the bundle itself and what it might contain, that she did not see the wicked little twinkle in the old woman's eye, nor hear her chuckle of fun as she hobbled off.

Shell-pink was down on her knees, as soon as the old woman had gone, cutting the cord and slitting open the wrappings of the bundle as fast as she could, expecting she knew not what lovely thing to spring out of it.

'It feels *very* soft and wobbly,' she said to herself as she came to the last wrapper; and when she had made a long slit in it, out toppled and poured an immense half-melted sticky jelly, which soon covered all the floor and the pretty seaweed carpet, and, rolling thickly round Shell-pink, held her fast, so that in trying to get up she only fell again, and lay full-length in the sticky stuff, stuck fast to the floor—a prisoner in her own house.

She screamed and screamed, and made such a noise that Pearl-grey heard her, and flew down to see what was the matter.

'Pearl-grey! Pearl-grey! get me up! get me up!' cried poor little Shell-pink. 'Why should my bundle

be *so* horrid when all yours were lovely? Oh, do be quick! *do* be quick!’

Then Pearl-grey flew back to her house and fetched some fresh water from her store in the big white shell, and, pouring it over Shell-pink, soon got her up from the sticky floor and out of the little house; but oh, what a mess she was in! Her pink gauze dress hung limp and dripping round her, her hair was all stuck together in lumps, and her delicate little wings were draggled and crushed.

Pearl-grey worked away, washing off the stickiness with fresh water, and then helping to straighten out the poor little wings and the gauze dress; and she comforted Shell-pink by telling her she would soon be quite dry again sitting out in the warm sunshine.

Shell-pink and Pearl-grey had both been so busy that they had not noticed another traveller pass by, and stop near Sea-green’s house when she called to him, and told him to put down the bundle he carried outside her door; for though it was certainly intended for her, she couldn’t possibly have such a dirty-looking thing inside her clean new house.

The traveller did as he was asked, and went quickly away; and Sea-green, smiling triumphantly to herself at the thought that *she* had got something nice this time before Pearl-grey could get it, did not hear his chuckle of delighted laughter as he slipped behind a huge rock.

Like Shell-pink, Sea-green hastily cut the cords and

slit open the wrappings of her bundle, eager to find something specially nice inside.

Before she came to the last wrapper she had to turn her face away more than once for the horrible smell which came from the bundle. And when the last slit was made, out sprang a huge prickly cactus, which grew and grew to the top of the door and all round the house, till Sea-green, who had sprung back into her house and drawn the curtain, was shut completely in—for she could not push past or through the prickles—and was as much a prisoner in her own house as Shell-pink had been in hers. She called and screamed to Pearl-grey to come and rescue her before she was choked with the horrible smell of the cactus flowers.

Pearl-grey heard the screams just as she finished helping Shell-pink, and flew to Sea-green's house.

'Get me out! get me out—before I—choke——' she heard through the branches of the cactus plant, in a voice growing gradually fainter and fainter.

Then Pearl-grey, whose feather wings were long and thick, spread them out flat, and leaning back against the cactus, she called to Shell-pink to come and climb up her, and on to the roof of Sea-green's house, and throw off the shells at the top, so that Sea-green could climb out that way.

And Shell-pink was so quick that they soon had Sea-green safe out of her house and lying on the dry sand, with Pearl-grey on one side of her, bathing her

head with cool fresh water, and Shell-pink on the other, fanning her with her wings. When she got a little better they all three went to Pearl-grey's house, and Sea-green lay down on the most comfortable couch, and said—

‘You *were* a long time in getting me out, I thought you'd never come. Pearl-grey took all the good bundles with nice things in them first, and left us nothing but the bad ones, with horrible, *horrible* things in them. She gets all the nice things, and even the King of the Fairies came to see *her*, and——’

‘*And,*’ interrupted Shell-pink, ‘*we* took all the prettiest shells first and left her nothing but drift-wood to build with. *We* were asked to take in the bundles first before she was, and we wouldn't take them. And even the King of the Fairies came to *our* doors first, and we didn't let him in, and——’

‘You needn't say any more,’ said Sea-green loftily, ‘I'm not listening’; for it sounded dreadfully true what Shell-pink had said, and Sea-green did not want to hear it. ‘I'm going back to the village; I don't care to live in such a lonely place as this,’ she added; ‘good-bye.’ And she got up from the couch and flew away. And Pearl-grey slipped her arm round Shell-pink, and said—

‘Come and live with me in my house, Shell-pink, there is plenty of room for two.’

And they lived happily ever afterwards in the little house of drift-wood.

And Sea-green built a gorgeous green palace to live in, all for herself alone, and thought she was going to be *quite* happy there. But she found it was very big and very lonely, and sometimes she wished she too had a little warm house of drift-wood, and some one to live in it with her like Shell-pink and Pearl-grey, though she would not have said so to any one for the world, and always pretended she was as happy as she could possibly be all the day long.

THE DREAM-PALACE

ONCE, in the wonderful 'long ago,' there lived a Princess in a Palace built all of pure white marble. The King, her father, loved her so dearly, that he spent all his spare time thinking of her, and planning for her the happiest life he could devise.

He gave her a suite of rooms in the Palace, daintily furnished, and hung with delicate-tinted fabrics, for her own special use ; and a garden with borders kept always full of fresh sweet-smelling flowers—roses, mignonette, pinks, violets, jasmine, wallflowers, and honeysuckle, and all other sorts in their seasons. There were ponies to ride on, boats on the lake to sail in, a carriage with six cream-coloured ponies to drive in, toys and books without number, music whenever she liked to ask for it ; and dresses of the most beautiful and delicate stuffs, and silks, and gauzes, set round with the finest embroideries and laces that could be procured ; and—though she did not know it—she was a very, very lovely little Princess, and was as happy as the day was long.

As she was an only child, the King had chosen a little set of companions for her ; they were all sunny happy-natured children,—for it was his great wish that no hint of sadness should come near the Princess as long as he could prevent it,—but they were by no means faultless in other ways.

There were four of them, each with quite different characters, and likes and dislikes. Dainty laughing Lillah liked always to be first in everything, and to be the most admired and best-loved wherever she went ; while Valerie thought only of power, and having satisfied herself that she was beautiful, she took it for granted that she would be admired by every one, and therefore did not seek for approbation ; she was proud, and longed above all things to rule over others. Rowena and Silvie, twin sisters, were good-natured, rather slow children, who took all that was given them almost as though they had a right to it, and were always ready for more, however much they might already have had.

One day, as the Princess and her companions were playing in the garden, one of them strayed away and sat down by herself on a stone seat, resting her chin on her hand, and gazing longingly away to the blue mountains in the far distance, beyond the lake and the woods and the plain.

The Princess had never known anything but happiness in her life ; she had never yet wished for



The four companions of the Princess.

anything that she could not have, and so did not understand what had befallen Lillah, her friend. She went to her and took her by the hand to draw her back again into the game they had been playing together, but Lillah shook her head, and said—

‘I cannot play to-day.’

‘Not play to-day?’ said the Princess wonderingly; ‘but why cannot you play, Lillah? everything is the same as always, nothing is changed, and you played all yesterday.’

‘Yesterday I had not heard of the Golden Palace in the blue mountains——’ began Lillah; ‘but this morning early I was dreaming, and I saw the wonderful palace and the golden road that leads right up to the door—which seemed to be always closed, though many people went up to it, and, I thought, passed in. And all day long I have seen it out there beyond the woods and the lake, and I know that one day I shall go across the lake to look for the golden road. I shall never be happy again till I have reached the Golden Palace and passed through that door, for I am sure there is something waiting there for me that is more beautiful than anything I have yet had in my life. Oh! I must go—I *must* go’; and she rose and passed swiftly down to the lake, and, seating herself in one of the little boats, sailed over the water to the farther shore, where she left the boat and disappeared into the wood.

The Princess gazed after her, too much astonished

at first to speak or move; then as Lillah disappeared from her sight, she said to herself—

‘Lillah! “laughing Lillah,” as we called her! she to dream of a golden palace away in the mountains, more beautiful than this, and to set out alone to seek it! Could a dream-palace be a happier place than this one in which we live? Oh, but she will never find it, and she will soon come back again, I am sure’; and the Princess went back to her other companions to finish the game which they had been playing together, thinking no more for the moment of Lillah and her dream-palace, content to wait for her expected return in the evening.

But Lillah did not return in the evening, and the King looked grave, when he heard what had happened, until he saw the Princess’s happy smiling face as she came to tell him—

‘Lillah has invented a new game, which begins with a dream-palace, and ends with setting out to find it! I don’t think it is a very good game, and we do not mean to play it to-morrow.’

However, when the morrow came, the Princess saw another of her companions slip away by herself, and sit gazing out into the distance as Lillah had done; and when the Princess spoke to her, she answered—

‘What can it be in the Golden Palace that Lillah has gone to find? I long to go and see too. She must surely have known or guessed what it was. Perhaps there will be jewels! or even a crown there! I *do* so

want to wear a crown'; and then like Lillah she too said, 'Oh, I must go! I *must* go!' and slipped away across the lake, and disappeared into the wood.

The Princess stood and watched her with a look of wonder on her face.

'They must think they will find something in the dream-palace that will make them happier than they are here, I suppose. Valerie hoped for a crown, but Lillah would never care for that. I wonder—I *wonder* what she wanted to find?'

When the King was told that another of the Princess's little companions had crossed the lake and disappeared into the wood, he looked graver than before, until the Princess came smiling up to him, and said—

'Father, Valerie has gone also to find the dream-palace, and look for jewels and a crown to wear. If I had only known she wanted them I would have given her all of mine. But she can still have them when she comes back, if she does not find any in the dream-palace.'

But neither Lillah nor Valerie returned; and when one day Rowena and Silvie went down to the lake, telling the Princess that they thought the dream-palace must contain more gold and silver than there was in all the rest of the world together, and that they hoped to find it and to come back richer than any one else had ever been,—the garden seemed to the Princess to be

very empty, for she alone was left in it, and she was lonely for the first time in her life.

She tried to play the games they had all liked best, but there was no one to seek for her when she hid, no one to wear the flower wreaths when she had made them, no one to ride on the ponies, no one to eat the little dainty dishes she cooked in her own little toy kitchen, no one to dance while she sang for them ; and she went to the King, and said—

‘ Father, I do not know what is wrong—but I cannot play to-day.’ And the King was very sad, for he had never seen the Princess’s face without a smile upon it in all her life before.

The next day the Princess wandered to the edge of the lake, and sat down and gazed at the blue mountains in the distance, and wondered where the dream-palace was, and what her companions were doing now.

‘ Oh, if they would only come back,’ she said aloud ; ‘ they were very happy here, and if it is only jewels and a crown that Valerie wants, and gold and silver that Rowena and Silvie want, I have plenty to give them ; they can have all I have. And Lillah—where is Lillah ? and what can she have gone to find ? Oh !’ she exclaimed suddenly, as a thought struck her, ‘ they *may* have forgotten the way home ! how can I find them and show them the way back ? Lillah said she saw in her dream a golden road leading right up to the door of the palace,—why there it is, I do believe, in the wood at the

other side of the lake, for I see it glittering! Oh, I must go! I *must* go!’ and like all her little companions, she stepped into a boat and sailed across the lake to the shore on the other side, and got out again at the place where she had seen the glittering road.

There certainly was a road there, but it was not golden, by any means, when she reached it. It was only a rough narrow path, with sharp stones on it which had no doubt caught the sunlight and glittered, and so given the appearance of a golden path when seen from a distance.

The Princess stood thinking a moment, and then bravely set off up the narrow path, for she could see no other, and she said to herself—

‘If this is the only path then the others *must* have taken it. How these stones will have hurt Lillah’s feet! she always wears such little thin white slippers, not like those of the other three at all.’

She went on, looking this way and that to lose no chance of finding the others, if they should have strayed from the path and yet be within sight, forgetting the rough stones she was walking over in her eagerness.

Presently she came through the wood, and saw the path winding across the plain to the mountains. She was puzzled at its dull appearance, for this certainly did not look like a golden road, but as there was no other, she could but follow it and hope that it might become more golden later on.

There were marshes on either side of the path, and ditches full of dark-looking water bordered with rushes, in a tuft of which latter she saw something white, and stooping to see what it was, she found a little slipper worn into holes and soiled with mud, but still to be recognised as one of Lillah's once dainty little pair.

The Princess picked it up, feeling sure now that she was on the right track, and would see Lillah again sometime soon.

She crossed the plain safely, and came to the foot of the mountains, and was resting on a low rock wondering when she would see the Golden Palace, when she heard a footstep, and, looking up, saw a little figure coming slowly towards her down the mountain side, her head proudly poised under its shining crown, and her dress sparkling all over with jewels. There was no smile on her face, and it was some moments before the Princess recognised Valerie—the leader in all their games—in this grand lady who looked and walked so like a queen.

But Valerie recognised the Princess and went up to her. The Princess rose to greet her, and exclaimed—

‘Oh, Valerie, I did not know you at first! you look so different. But how glad I am to have found you. Where are the others?’

‘The others?’ echoed Valerie. ‘I do not know, I have not seen them. I came to look for the Golden Palace and see what there was there waiting for me. And see, I have found what I went to look for!’ and she

turned herself this way and that for the Princess to see the full effect from all points of view, sure, as usual, of her admiration.

‘And are you happier now than you were, Valerie?’ asked the Princess, when she had seen and admired everything. ‘And do you like your golden crown?’

Valerie turned her face away and sighed, and then before the Princess could re-seat herself on the low rock, Valerie had sunk down behind it, and lay like a little crushed heap of finery on the ground, quivering with sobs of disappointment.

The Princess bent over her, and heard her say—

‘Oh, it is *so* heavy! and there are spikes inside that press against my head, and I hardly know how to bear the pain; but the crown is so firmly fixed that I cannot, if I would, take it off my head.’

The Princess untied her silken sash, and wound it in and out of the cruel spikes inside the crown, to relieve the pressure on Valerie’s head, and did her best to comfort her; and she did succeed at last in bringing one tiny smile to her face, though it was but a poor little copy of the old happy ones that used to be there.

It was not long before Rowena and Silvie were seen coming down the path laden with bags of all sizes, from the small ones hung in strings round their necks and waists, to the large ones fastened to their shoulders, and carried in their arms.

They looked happy, and began at once to tell the

Princess and Valerie how they had found the Golden Palace, and how wonderful it was ; and how they had found a heap of bags of gold and silver—more than they could possibly carry away—lying ready for them, with their names written in gold and silver on each bag.

‘ Now we shall be rich for ever, and shall always be able to have everything we want, and be perfectly happy all our lives ! ’ they both said at once.

The Princess smiled up at them, with pleasure, as she tried to count the number of bags they were carrying, wondering to herself if they would not be *very* heavy to carry all the way home.

‘ But where is Lillah ? ’ she asked at last.

‘ Oh—Lillah,’ they said slowly, ‘ we have not seen her, we had so much to do to arrange how to carry our money-bags that there was no time to think of Lillah and Valerie ; but we see you have got your crown and your jewels, Valerie, and we hope you like them.’

Then, before Valerie could answer, they hurried on down the path that led over the plain, in order to reach home before dark, for fear they should be robbed of their treasure on the way.

The Princess was becoming anxious about Lillah, whose little shoe she was still carrying. She wanted to go forward to look for her up the mountain, but she did not like to leave poor Valerie all alone, and what to do she did not know.

Then suddenly she heard a voice singing, and then

a pitiful little echo of a laugh that was trying to pretend to be gay, and, looking up, she saw Lillah coming towards her, limping a little, and trying to hold her torn dress together in graceful folds, and look her best as usual.

The Princess ran forward to meet her, and threw her arms round her, saying how glad, how *very* glad she was to find her at last, and begging her to come and tell her and Valerie what it was she went out to look for in the Golden Palace? and whether she had indeed found it?

Poor Lillah tried hard to smile, but her voice trembled, and tears were very near, as she said—

‘I longed so to be loved more than any one else—more even than you are, my Princess; and I thought I should find myself Queen in my own dream-palace, and that I should be loved above all others. I hurried to reach it, and the door that seemed closed opened easily to my touch, but when I passed in there was no one there! it was empty, quite, quite empty, and I was all alone!’

‘But surely,’ said the Princess, as she pressed Lillah’s hand tenderly in her own, ‘you saw Valerie? and Rowena and Silvie? they were all there, and they found the treasures they went to look for.’

‘No, I saw *no* one there,’ said Lillah again sadly, ‘and even if they had been there, *they* do not care very much for me.’

The Princess stood still, looking from one to the other of her companions, and wondering—wondering—how it could be that they had all been to the same Golden Palace, by the same path, and none of them had seen the others. She shook her head slowly, and said—

‘I don’t understand. I don’t understand.’

And then she gave Lillah her little thin shoe and helped her to put it on, and led the way towards home, across the plain and through the wood, helping Lillah over the sharp stones, and trying to cheer Valerie and bring the smiles back to her face again.

Though they were not able to walk very fast, they overtook Rowena and Silvie in the wood, not far from the shore of the lake.

They were sitting on a fallen tree, sighing and groaning, and calling to the Princess and the other two to come and help them. The Princess hurried forward to ask what was wrong, and Rowena cried out—

‘Oh, the weight of these bags! they have grown heavier and heavier as we came along, till now I can walk no farther.’

‘And I,’ groaned Silvie, ‘cannot even get up from the ground.’

‘Oh *do* help us, *do* carry our bags for us, just across the lake and home,’ they both cried at once; ‘it is not far from here now.’

The Princess bent down to raise one of the bags to carry it for Rowena; but Lillah, who had not seen the

twin sisters since she left home, asked Silvie what was in all those bags she had carried so far.

‘It must be something very precious surely that you set so much store by it,’ she said; ‘do show it to me.’

‘Yes,’ said Rowena and Silvie both together, ‘it *is* very precious; these bags hold more gold and silver than you have ever seen before, and it is all ours, to do whatever we like with’; and so saying, she opened the mouth of the largest bag and put in her hand to draw out a handful of gold pieces, smiling contentedly. But, to her astonishment and grief, she soon found that instead of gold pieces there was nothing in her bag but stones and pieces of lead.

‘Oh, Silvie, Silvie!’ she cried, as she hastily opened bag after bag, ‘where is our gold?’ and Silvie, having quickly examined her bags, chimed in with—

‘Oh, Rowena, *where* is our silver?’

‘How could we have been deceived?’ they both said together; ‘we both saw the shining gold and silver pieces in the Golden Palace lying in these very bags that we have carried all this way for nothing.’

Then they took the strings of the smaller bags from round their necks and waists, and the larger ones from off their backs, and left them—together with those they had carried in their arms—lying by the side of the fallen tree in the wood, and slowly followed the Princess and the other two to the shore of the lake, and crossed

over with them to the other side, in the little boats they had left to wait for their return.

As the Princess stepped out of her boat, she exclaimed—

‘Why, Lillah—look! there is the golden path leading home! and look—oh, look! the Palace is all gleaming and shining gold! I thought you told me that the path to your Golden Dream-Palace was all of gold? but I did not see it, and I do not remember to have seen the Golden Dream-Palace either. Where was it? Did every one see the golden path except me?’ she asked, turning to each in turn for an answer.

‘There was—there was only one path to follow——’ began Lillah, hesitating a little.

‘Yes, and the palace looked so dazzling, right in front of one’s eyes, that one could not see much of the path; though I always supposed it was of gold,’ said Valerie. And Rowena and Silvie said they had been so busy talking of all the things they would do and buy for themselves when they were very rich, that they had not noticed the path at all.

‘There can be no path so golden as this is,’ said the Princess at last; ‘and though I never saw the Golden Dream-Palace, I do not think it can have been more beautiful than our real home is. Come, let us go in.’

At the gate of the garden Valerie stopped, and said—

‘I cannot go in; I have no right to wear a crown where *you* are our Queen, Princess’; and she put her

hands up to her head to try and move the hateful thing. But, instead of the heavy hard crown she expected to grasp, she felt nothing in her hands but a wreath of yellow dandelions, held together with the silken sash that the Princess had lent her ; and the jewels that had been strewn all over her dress were dropping off like a shower of coloured rain-drops to the ground. She threw the wreath of dandelions as far from her as she could, and, carrying the silken sash in her hand, she followed the Princess, with drooping head, through the gate into the Palace garden.

At the great door of the Palace stood the King, and as he came down the steps to meet and welcome them home again, the Princess ran forward, exclaiming—

‘ Father, they have all come back again, but the golden road we did not find till we reached the path that led us home.’

And, afterwards, Rowena and Silvie found themselves far richer in happiness in the Princess’s company than they had imagined they would be with the bags of gold and silver they had tried to carry home ; Valerie recognised that a crown can bring pain and weariness as well as glory in its train ; and as for Lillah—it began slowly to dawn upon her that deep in her heart the Princess had really always loved her best of all her companions ; and that was far more to Lillah than all the dream-palaces in the world, however golden and splendid they might appear from a distance.

THE SINGER

AT the edge of a moor, high up on the hills, stood a tiny cottage with only two rooms in it and an attic above. An old woman and her little granddaughter, Huldah, lived here alone; and Huldah learned how to clean and scrub and darn and patch, and grow potatoes and boil them for dinner. But as for book-learning, her grandmother said she had never had any herself, and had done very well without it, and she saw no reason why Huldah should need any; therefore she took no steps to procure it for her, beyond just such reading and writing and arithmetic as she could learn from an old woman who lived in a cottage two miles off, and kept a dame school.

Huldah thought differently. She wanted 'to learn about things,' she said, and worried her grandmother for books to read, until at last the old woman took a great key from the mantel-shelf, and went to the big chest that stood under the window, and opened it, saying to herself—



Hiddah found it an enchanting book.

‘If she gets one of her grandfather’s books she’ll soon tire of her longing to read.’ And she thrust her hand down to the bottom of the chest, and pulled out a thick heavy book, which she handed to Huldah, saying—

‘There, child, read that. You’ll not be asking me for more in a hurry, I’ll be thinking.’

But Huldah found it an enchanting book, full of pictures about which she wove stories of her own, when she found the printed descriptions of them too full of hard words for her to understand. Sometimes she puzzled her grandmother with asking the meanings of these words, but, on the whole, she found it less trouble to invent stories for the pictures by herself.

Her favourite picture was one of a tall slim lad in a curious close-fitting dress of dull grey blue, and a long faded brown cloak hanging from his shoulders behind.

His dark hair curled from under a brown pointed cap, and he held in his hand a violin on which he was playing; and the look of pure joy on his face plainly showed that for him there was nothing else in the whole world so great and wonderful as music.

Huldah had once seen a violin at a village fair, and had heard its owner play a few notes upon it, and had ever since longed to hear more.

She wandered off alone one dull misty day, to the foot of a great wall of rock, where she knew she could awaken an echo; and there she sat down to think of

the picture, and wonder what the melody could be that the boy was playing with such deep absorption.

She sang every song she knew, but none of them seemed good enough, and she tried again and again, sometimes softly, and sometimes throwing her voice out and then listening for the echo, till at last, when she stopped singing, the echo seemed to her to continue, and she heard the most wonderful melody coming from somewhere,—but where she could not tell.

The mist had thickened and she could not see anything, so she went forward slowly along the face of the rock, feeling with her hands, and listening eagerly to the music.

‘I am getting nearer to it,’ she said to herself; ‘where *does* it come from? Oh, if I could only sing that tune——’

Then she felt a narrow crack in the rock, and a gleam of light shone out through the mist. She put her face close to the crack, and saw far down it, through the rock, into a cave dimly lighted, in the centre of which stood, all alone, the boy of the picture in her grandfather’s book, in his blue dress and brown cloak, playing his violin.

‘He can’t see me,’ she thought; ‘I’ll stay and listen, and perhaps I shall be able to learn that wonderful tune.’

And she stayed—and stayed—till a wind sprang up out of the north and lifted the mist, and she found

herself looking at a crack in the rock, no deeper than the length of her arm, and listening for the melody that had ceased.

She went down the mountain path again to the cottage, trying to remember that wonderful tune, but, try as she would, not one note could she recall. So intent was she upon this, that she hardly heard her grandmother asking her why she was so late, and where she had been, and she went off to bed, scarcely answering her grandmother's questions, and leaving her supper untouched on the table.

Huldah had always seemed different from other children, and when she took to going off by herself for hours at a time—actually forgetting her meals sometimes—even her grandmother began to wonder where she went and why.

'For,' she said to a friend one day, who came to see her from the village, 'no kind of weather stops her; it seems to me she likes the storms, and the thicker the mist, the more she hurries over her work, to be off and out on the mountain. It isn't over safe, but I can't stop her, nor can I go out after her.'

'Well,' said the friend, 'if I were you I'd lock her up in the attic, and take the key away.'

But there was no key to any door at all in the cottage; even the outer door was only fastened by an ordinary latch, and an iron bar which swung on a great nail in the centre of it; and there had never

been a lock and key to it as long as the old woman could remember.

There was one thing that Huldah never forgot and never neglected, and that was the work of the house that fell to her share, and the little odd things that she could do to add to her grandmother's comfort.

Every morning when she woke she looked out eagerly from the tiny window near her bed to see what sort of a day it was likely to be; and when she saw white clouds lying low like huge pillows of cotton-wool on the mountain sides, her eyes would sparkle, and she would jump out of bed and hurry through her dressing and her work; and having made everything clean and tidy and left things ready for her grandmother, she would slip away and up the mountain track to the great wall of rock, sometimes having just to feel her way through the thick white mist, when she could not see the track.

Then, standing close to the crack in the rock, she would begin to sing softly, and by degrees raise her voice until the echoes awoke and the gleam of light shone through the crack in the rock, and she could see the boy of the picture, and hear the notes of his violin as he drew his bow backwards and forwards over the strings.

One day, as she stood watching and listening, he stopped and hesitated in the very middle of the melody he had played the first day she had heard him, and,

forgetting everything but just the wonderful music, Huldah began to sing the notes, continuing from where he left off—singing as she knew she had never sung before—and suddenly realising, as she came to the end of the piece, that she now knew every note of the tune from beginning to end.

As she sang, the boy raised his eyes and looked straight at her, and then drew his bow softly across the strings, and played an accompaniment to her song.

And now, day after day, she learned something new, and found she could remember all she learned; but never once did the boy move one step from his place in the middle of the cave where she had first seen him standing, and never did he speak one single word to her.

Sometimes, as she sang, she began to put words to the music, for some of the melodies she learnt from the boy ‘meant so much,’ she said to herself, ‘and the words *will* come somehow.’ But never did they come to the first beautiful melody that she loved above all the rest.

Sometimes it was only a refrain, coming again and again, that she sang, but sometimes whole verses came; and now that she could remember every note and word, she would often sing softly as she worked in the cottage, and her grandmother, hearing her, would sit listening, her busy hands still for a few moments, and her old head slowly shaking, as she murmured—

‘Her grandfather over again—all over again. Maybe

I'd better not have given her that old book of his. Well, no harm has come of it as yet though; time enough—time enough—she's but a child, a little child.'

But Huldah was growing up, though her grandmother never seemed to think so, and it troubled her to see how old and feeble her grandmother was growing. All through one summer Huldah spent much more of her time than she had ever done before, tending her, and when at last the winter came, the great cold was too much for her, and she faded slowly, and died.

And Huldah stayed on alone in the cottage, still going to the wall of rock and singing; and now a refrain kept coming again and again to her lips—

'Far down in the valley below, below,
Far down in the valley below——'

'What does it mean? and why does it always stop there?' she wondered. 'I want to know more, but I cannot tell how it should go on.'

Now, though Huldah did not know it, living as she did such a lonely life on the mountain side, a new road had been begun a year ago, and had just reached the village in the valley. This meant that tourists had begun to walk and drive to the hitherto almost inaccessible little place, and to wander over the mountains.

One day two of these visitors lost their way in one of the thick mists that Huldah delighted in, and, happening upon the wall of rock, stopped and stood

listening, spell-bound, to the glorious voice they heard singing somewhere in the mist.

‘Wonderful! wonderful!’ said one of them aloud, as Huldah paused for a moment; and she, startled at hearing a voice when she supposed herself to be alone, turned and fled down the rough track—as the mist lifted a little—without looking back, and shut herself into the cottage, putting up the iron bar across the door—though it was still quite early in the afternoon—half laughing at herself at trying to bar out a voice.

She did not summon courage to go again to the wall of rock for some days; and then at last she could wait no longer, and went up on a clear bright morning when she could see any one who might pass by, and felt she could not be startled by a voice whose owner she could not see.

She never saw the ‘picture-boy’ on a clear bright day, he only came when the clouds lay thick and low on the mountain; so she sat and sang by herself this morning, the old refrain coming again and again to her lips—

‘Far down in the valley below, below——’

till it seemed as if she could sing nothing but that beloved melody, always beginning with those words, but never finishing.

And then again, as before, she heard the voice coming from round the corner of the rock wall, saying—

‘Wonderful! wonderful!’ and she got up and went round that corner, and saw the owner of the voice—a little old gentleman with white hair and kind blue eyes; and he was soon telling her the end of the song and all that it might mean to her, and asking her to come ‘down to the valley below’ and have her wonderful voice trained, that she might give pleasure with her singing to thousands and thousands of people living away out in the world.

And she, listening to him, thought—‘I am all alone here—of no use to any one; if this is true what he tells me, that I can give pleasure with my voice, I will go and try.’

So Huldah went back to the cottage, and made a little bundle of the few things she valued, including her grandfather’s book with the picture of the boy-violinist in it, and, closing the door, went away down the road to the ‘valley below’ with the old man.

And so began the life of a great and wonderful singer. And though the words of the melody she loved best never came to Huldah, she knew what its meaning was, and would often sit singing the refrain—

‘Far down in the valley below, below,
Far down in the valley below——’

to herself when she was alone, thinking of her old life in the cottage, and of the wonderful music she used to hear on the mountain side.

THE LITTLE KNIGHT OF THE OLD CHAIN-ARMOUR

ONCE upon a time there was a great quarrel in Fairyland between a good fairy and a wicked fairy. It was all because they both wanted to be godmother to the little daughter of a great and powerful Earl, and each wished to arrange the happenings in her life for her, without interference from the other. At last the quarrel grew so furious that the King of the Fairies had to interfere, and he decided that they should divide the little Rosamond's life between them, each taking twelve hours at a time—turn and turn about—to watch over her. Unluckily for Rosamond, the Wicked Fairy arrived at the Castle first, and took possession of the twelve hours of day-time for her share, leaving only the twelve hours of night-time for the Good Fairy.

For the first few years of her life the greatest care was taken of Rosamond. She was never left alone for one moment, day or night, for fear the Wicked Fairy should harm her in some way. Every door and window

in the Castle was bolted and barred at night, and Rosamond was tied into her bed, and a silken cord was fastened from her wrist to that of her nurse, in case the Wicked Fairy should come in the early morning to carry her off before the nurse was awake.

But after a time, as nothing untoward happened, the Countess, Rosamond's mother, began to think that perhaps she had made too much of the danger, and that now that Rosamond was ten years old, she might be allowed more liberty ; and so the strict rules were relaxed a little, and the Countess even went so far as to make a pilgrimage to a Holy Well—which took her ten days to accomplish—during the time her husband, the Earl, was away at the wars with their eldest son Leo. Thus Rosamond was left at home alone with her two little brothers, in the charge of their nurse.

Now the Wicked Fairy was only waiting for something of this kind to happen, in order to carry off Rosamond for her own purposes ; for as long as Rosamond was with her mother, she knew she could not do her very much harm, especially as the Good Fairy had charge of her for the alternate twelve hours.

On the day that the Countess started on her pilgrimage, the Wicked Fairy watched the nurse take the children out into the orchard to play, and seat herself down under a pear-tree with her sewing ; and then the Wicked Fairy hid herself in the branches of the tree, and dropped a ripe pear into the nurse's lap.

Now the nurse would not on any account have gathered a pear from one of her master's trees without leave, but when one actually fell into her lap, apparently of its own accord, she thought it could not be wrong to eat it, which she at once proceeded to do. She did not know that the Wicked Fairy had bored a little hole in it first, and poured in some fairy stuff, which sent her off into a sound sleep as soon as she had swallowed it.

Then the Wicked Fairy turned herself into a rabbit, and pretended to have hurt her foot; and Rosamond, seeing her, ran after her, trying to catch her in order to tie up the poor little lame foot with her handkerchief.

The rabbit ambled along on her other three feet, keeping always just ahead of Rosamond and out of her reach. And the little girl followed on and on, out of the orchard and into the wood beyond, always hopping to catch the little creature, till at last the rabbit popped into a hole, and Rosamond stopped—out of breath—and looked round about her, wondering where she was.

The Wicked Fairy had disappeared into a hole, only to return once more in the shape of an old woman picking up sticks; and Rosamond went up to her, and asked her if she could show her the way back again to the orchard.

‘Lost your way, my dear, have you?’ said the old woman. ‘Well, come along with me and I’ll see you

home. I'll take care of you. You just help me with these sticks and I'll look after you.'

And Rosamond, taken in by her apparent kindness, thought she was just a very nice old woman, and began to help her with her sticks ; but whether she fell asleep, or what happened to her after she stooped to pick up the first stick, Rosamond never knew, but certain it was she suddenly found herself no longer in the wood picking up sticks, but sitting on a broken chair at a rickety old table, in a dimly lighted cellar, making and embroidering leather gloves as fast as her fingers could move.

The Wicked Fairy sat opposite her, smoking a short black pipe of carved wood, grunting and grumbling at her for being so slow, and every now and then reaching out a skinny old hand to box Rosamond's ears, or slap her cheek, just for the pleasure of seeing her wince. It seemed to make no difference how fast she worked, the Wicked Fairy still grumbled and slapped on, and called her a 'lazy snail,' and many other disagreeable names of the kind. The curious part of it was that Rosamond remembered nothing of what had happened to her before she came to the cellar. For all she knew she might always have lived there, making gloves for the old woman, hearing her grumbles, and dodging her slaps when she could.

Her feet were cold, for she had no stockings on ; her face and hands were dirty, and her hair all tumbled and tangled, and she was very hungry ; but she had

forgotten that she had ever had anything different in her life, so it did not occur to her to complain.

At the end of the long day the Wicked Fairy made a parcel of all the work done by Rosamond, and hobbling out of the room with the packet under her arm, she locked the door behind her, and left Rosamond alone in the dusk, with a cup of cold water and a crust of dry bread, which was all the food she had had since she left the orchard.

The Wicked Fairy muttered to herself as she went along—

‘First she shall be starved, and made to work. And then she shall be taught to thief and lie—*thieve and lie!* A fine thing it will be for an Earl’s daughter—with a Good Fairy for godmother—to thief and lie, and look starved and pinched! Ha! ha! *We* shall soon see who is strongest! and what I can do in *my* twelve hours!’

Rosamond stretched out her arms and yawned, as the rusty key turned in the lock, and then, throwing herself down on a small mattress on the floor near the wall, she began to nibble at the dry bread, and to *wish* her feet were not so cold.

There was only one window in the cellar, and that, of course, was half underground, with a grating above it to let in as much light as possible.

Rosamond lay in the darkness and listened to the tramp, tramp of the people passing in the narrow street

above, till some one in the house opposite set a lantern in the window, and a long streak of light appeared on the wall by the side of Rosamond's mattress.

She stared at it till it seemed to her to quiver, and then to widen, and then through it she saw a flight of wooden steps leading up to a closed door; and the sudden longing to know what lay on the other side of that door was so great that, before she knew what she was doing, she had run up the steps to the top, and laid her hand on the door-handle.

And then the door opened, and she saw two little boys standing, apparently waiting for her, and calling—

‘Rosamond! Rosamond! are you *never* coming?’

And then it all came back to her, and she remembered where she was—in her own home with her own little brothers once more; for the Good Fairy's twelve hours had just begun, and she had brought Rosamond home again for the first time. And just as Rosamond had completely forgotten her home-life when she was making gloves in the cellar, so, now that she was at home, she had as entirely forgotten the time she had spent in the cellar.

When the nurse awoke late in the afternoon, she was horrified to find how long she had slept, and dreadfully frightened when she missed Rosamond. The little boys could only tell her that Rosamond had run off after a lame rabbit, and that they had not seen her again.

Of course there was a great hue and cry, but every-

thing was hushed up again when Rosamond quietly reappeared in the evening. The nurse thought it very strange that she could give no account of herself, and did not know where she had been, but as she was now safe and sound at home again, she did not trouble further that night.

But when each morning after this Rosamond disappeared regularly, and as regularly returned at night, the nurse began to put two and two together, and came to the conclusion that the two fairy-godmothers must have something to do with such curious goings on, and therefore she took no blame to herself, and waited till the Countess should return and look into the matter herself.

Every night when she ran up the wooden stairs and through the door that led into the Castle, Rosamond noticed a wonderful scent of sweet spices in the air, and she was clean and tidy and dressed in her own pretty home frock ; but every morning when she got up from her mattress in the cellar, she was in rags once more, with her hair all tangled and tumbled, and her face and hands unwashed ; and the smoke from the Wicked Fairy's pipe hung heavy in the air.

Rosamond's little brothers often asked her where she went to every day, and why she did not stay and play with them as she used to do ; but she could tell them nothing, for she never could remember where she had been during the day. And only to Leo did she once

say dreamily, when he was questioning her, after his return from the wars—

‘ I dream each morning the same dream always—that I am sinking down—down—down——’ ; but that was all, she could never say what happened next.

When the Countess returned from her pilgrimage she knew at once that the Wicked Fairy must be at the bottom of all the trouble. It was of no use to tie Rosamond to the bedstead, and to lock and bolt all the windows in the Castle, for locks and bolts made no difference to the fairy, and Rosamond disappeared every morning no matter what precautions were taken overnight to keep her safe at home. The Countess was at her wits’ end to know what should be done next, and at last sent a messenger to the Earl to beg him to let Leo come home again and help her in her great difficulty. When Leo returned and had heard all that was happening, he was furious with the Wicked Fairy, and made a vow never to rest till he had rescued his little sister from her clutches.

Each evening when Rosamond came home she looked a little thinner and a little more pale, and there were new bruises on her arms and shoulders which made Leo writhe with anger. The Wicked Fairy was doing her worst to spite the Good Fairy, and she seemed to be succeeding fairly well.

Leo had tried everything he could think of to keep Rosamond at home. He sat up at night to watch beside

her bed, but always in the morning she had gone, and he had not seen her go; he chained his wrist to hers—thinking the chain would be stronger than the old cord—and held her all night in his arms that he might be taken away with her wherever she went; but in the morning she was gone, and he was left alone with a bruised and swollen wrist, and the chain lying on the floor beside him. And in the evening Rosamond returned with a sore wrist also, and no recollection of how it had come to her.

The Wicked Fairy had complete power over her during her twelve hours, and determined to do her as much harm as she could in the time, and to get as much pleasure out of her sufferings as possible, also; and of course the Good Fairy, having complete power over her during *her* twelve hours, was equally determined to do her as much good as possible, and frustrate the Wicked Fairy's plans as far as she was able. But, as the two fairies were equal in power, this was not so easy as it might seem.

One evening when Leo was sitting alone in the great hall of the Castle, staring miserably into the red-hot ashes on the hearth, and puzzling over the old difficulty of how to set about the rescue of Rosamond, he became aware of a long wreath of smoke which was curling out from the chimney into the room, and, before he realised what was happening, there before him stood the Good Fairy.

She beckoned to him with one tiny hand, and then flitted away through one of the doors of the hall which led to the armoury, and Leo followed quickly behind her.

It was dark in the armoury, and he lighted a torch and peered about for the fairy ; she was still beckoning to him, and he followed her in and out of the piles of old armour and worn-out horseshoes and scraps of iron of all sorts that lay about, till, as he came round a corner of the great furnace, he lost sight of her, and at the same moment something caught him a blow on the head ; and he, thinking some one must have been in hiding there unknown to him, struck out in self defence, and his hand came in contact with an iron ring hanging from the rafters on a chain. He caught hold of it and pulled at it strongly ; and suddenly the chain hung loose on the ring, and if he had not been very nimble in jumping aside, he would have been crushed under a heavy old trunk which fell to the ground, and lay on the spot where he had just been standing.

The trunk had burst open as it struck the stone floor, and slipping half out of it, Leo saw an old suit of chain-armour—long since out of fashion—very rusty, but still intact, as he found when he eagerly examined it. He stuck the torch on a spike near the furnace, and forgetting everything else, he spread out the suit on the floor, and then held it up against himself to test the size. And then slowly he put it on, and took up the sword in

one hand and the shield in the other, and stood quite still for a moment, wondering why he had done this, for his own bright suit of armour—of which he was so proud—hung in its usual place ready for him to put it on if need be, and this was such a rusty old suit.

The torch was burning itself out, and the smoke from it rose in thick curls; and as Leo watched it, the fairy gradually appeared from it—as she had done before from the smoke of the fire—and then he knew that the fairy must have intended him to wear this suit for some reason of her own, and that it behoved him therefore not to complain of the rust. She looked at him, up and down, from steel head-piece to mailed foot, looked down the edge of the drawn sword, and glanced at the front of the shield; and then he thought he heard the words, ‘It will be bright when he returns,’ as she slipped behind him, and pushing his shield arm out till he held the shield at arm’s-length before him, she breathed on the inner side of it, and the rust fell from it, and it shone as though fresh from the hands of the burnisher; and he read on its surface the words—

‘Wander east and wander west,
The shield will guide you for the rest.’

And then he heard the fairy telling him that he was to go to find Rosamond in the house of the Wicked Fairy, whom he would know by the short black pipe of carved ebony that she always held in her mouth. She told him

that the smoke from this pipe caused Rosamond to forget all her life in the Castle, and all the good she had ever learned there, during the twelve hours that she was in the power of the Wicked Fairy, just as the perfume from the sweet spices with which she—the Good Fairy—surrounded her when she returned home each evening, made her forget her life with the Wicked Fairy. Nevertheless the evil was beginning to gain ground, and therefore the Good Fairy had called Leo to help her during the twelve hours of the day-time when she had no power over Rosamond at all herself. She told him he must go alone, but she gave him a packet of the sweet spice-powder, telling him to take great care of it, as he would need it later on, and she warned him to beware of the smoke from the Wicked Fairy's pipe.

With the last words of the fairy the torch flickered out, and in the darkness Leo felt himself sinking down—down—and he remembered how Rosamond had told him—

‘I dream each morning the same dream always—that I am sinking down—down—down——’ and he felt that now, at last, he must be on the way to her rescue.

When at length he came to a standstill he found himself in a narrow, roughly paved street, with high houses on either side.

The light was still dim, for the sun had not yet fully risen, and he turned towards the east, thinking to see more clearly.

He wandered on down the street, and presently found that it ended in a high wall. He glanced at it carelessly, and was turning away, when he heard a low muffled sound of distress, seeming to come from some part of the wall. He went back, and this time, looking carefully over its surface, he saw a niche many feet above the ground, which appeared to be filled with something draped in a thick grey curtain.

As he listened he felt more and more certain that the sounds came from the niche, and the longer he listened the more despairing they became, and he looked about to try and find some means of reaching the niche, and helping whatever it was that was in such distress.

He could find no steps leading up to the niche, and there was not even a rope or a chain by which any one could have climbed, or been pulled up, to it; but on examining the flat surface of the wall more closely, he found some tiny little crevices, between the smooth stones with which it was built, and he determined to try to reach the niche by means of them.

First he sheathed his sword, and slung his shield behind him, and then he began to try to climb up the wall, clinging by his fingers in the tiny crevices and trying to gain a foothold for his feet.

He fell many times, and very nearly gave up the attempt altogether, it seemed so hopeless. But such a pitiful little wail came from the niche just at that moment, that he tried once again, and this time found

that the stone was of a far softer kind than he had at first imagined, and that the crevices had become so much larger with his struggles and scramblings, that now it was just possible to rest his feet in them, and he soon reached the projecting ledge of the niche with his hands, and pulled himself up on to it.

When at last he stood upright in the niche, he saw that the grey drapery was composed of fold upon fold of spiders' web twisted round and round the figure of a child, imprisoning it so completely that it could not move.

Then he began very gently to cut through the outer folds with his sword, talking softly to the poor little thing all the while; and, as he cut, the wails grew less and less. He had just freed one little arm, when he heard a scrambling and scuttering sound, and looking down, he saw on the wall, climbing up by the way he had come himself, a spider as large as he was, with great staring green eyes standing out from its head. He struck at it with his sword, but though he hit it full between the eyes, the blow seemed to make no impression on it at all.

It climbed swiftly over the front of the niche, and then, swinging from side to side and up and down, it began to form a thick web or curtain, shutting Leo and the child into the niche.

Leo cut through the web more than once, but each time it was formed again more quickly than before,

and he left it, that he might finish releasing the child from his wrappings.

When at last he was free, the curtain in front of the niche was too thick for Leo's sword to cut through, and for a moment he felt in despair. Then suddenly he thought of his shield, and swung it round from his back where he had slung it for greater ease in climbing, and holding it out in front of him, he looked at its shining inner side. Reflected in it he saw a tiny door set in the thickness of the wall, and turning quickly round, he pushed it open, and drew the child through it after him, and groped his way along a passage so low and narrow that his arms and legs and his head scraped against the sides and the top as he moved.

At the end of three or four yards he came to a second door which was not quite closed, and then the child spoke for the first time, and said—

‘The spider lives in there—take care!’

‘What must we do then?’ asked Leo; ‘shall we go back to the niche?’

‘Oh—I—I don’t—*know*,’ said the child despairingly, and clinging to Leo’s sword hand, he cried—

‘Lift me up! carry me—carry me—oh! *please* do!’ and Leo stooped and lifted him, and he put his little arms round Leo’s neck, and clung there, hiding his face.

Leo pushed the door open, and went through it into a large upper room with a stone floor, and one narrow

window which let in just enough light to show Leo the great spider sitting hunched up in the middle of the floor.

He remembered that his sword had been of no help to him in his last encounter with the spider—which in a manner was a comforting thought ; for now that he was carrying the child—and he dare not put him down—his sword arm was no longer free.

The spider lay quite still, so Leo, encouraged, moved cautiously forwards, hoping to pass it safely on his way to the door of the room, which stood in the wall opposite. But as he drew nearer to the spider, first one great leg moved, and then another, and Leo, in desperation, made a dash forward, but was suddenly stopped by three spider ropes—which he had not seen—slung across the room from end to end, about two feet from the floor, as fine as hairs, but as strong as thick wires. He was so taken aback that for a moment he stood quite still, and then, as the spider came behind him and stood up on its back legs ready to pounce upon him, he thought again of his shield, and quickly raised it.

In its shining surface he saw the great spider reflected, just about to spring, but to his intense relief he saw it start and shrink down—as the light from the window caught the shield and glanced back on it—and then the staring green eyes dropped out on to the floor with a clatter, and the great creature shrank and shrivelled up till it was no bigger than an ordinary little

spider, and Leo stepped backwards and crushed it with his heel.

Then the child loosened his arms from Leo's neck, and slipped to the ground, crying—

'Pick up the eyes! pick up the eyes!' and pounced down on the two bright green eyes and held them tight in one little hand, while with the other he took firm hold of Leo's sword-belt, and followed him as he stooped to pass under the spider ropes and down some steps to the street outside.

Once safe in the street the child turned to look with admiring eyes at Leo—his deliverer—and shyly touching his armour with his hand, he said—

'It *does* shine bright!'

'Bright?' said Leo to himself, 'my rusty old armour bright?' and then, as he looked at it, he knew that in his struggles to climb the wall and reach the niche, and afterwards to push through the narrow passage, he had rubbed off the rust and polished the old armour against the stone walls till it shone bright as the child had said—like the inner side of the shield. But it was not quite perfect yet; there were still a few dull places, which Leo saw, though the child did not seem to have noticed them at all.

The child was calling to Leo to follow him, and they went together down the street, and passed the place where Leo had stood early in the morning, and went on beyond, till the child stopped at the door of one of the

tall houses and knocked with his little doubled-up fist, calling out—

‘Father! father! let me in.’ Soon the door was opened by a little shrivelled-up stick of a man, bent and crippled with rheumatism, who gave a startled cry when he saw the child, and snatched him up in his arms, where he held him so tight in fear of losing him again that the child could only gasp out—

‘I’ve—got the eyes—father! I’ve got—the eyes. Please—put me down.’

Then, and then only, did the man put the child down and call to Leo to come inside his house, where he explained to him that the Wicked Fairy—to spite him—had caused the spider to run away with his little son because he had once, by mistake, sold her some tobacco of a kind she particularly disliked. The spider was a servant of the Wicked Fairy’s, but as it was old and quite blind, the Wicked Fairy had lent it a magic pair of green eyes—partly for its protection, and partly to insure her cruel orders being well carried out. These eyes were of great value to the Wicked Fairy, as most of her power lay in them: without them she could see very little, and her hearing and sense of smell were much weakened also, but she willingly gave up her eyes for a time for the joy of punishing the boy’s father.

It was the knowledge of their value that made the child so eager to pick up the eyes and bring them to his father. ‘And now, tell me, how did you escape from

the spider, my son?' he asked, setting the child on his knee.

Then the little boy told his father how Leo had rescued him from the niche, and finally crushed the spider with his heel, and left it dead, after the light from the shield had struck out the protecting eyes and shrivelled it up quite small. The poor man was so grateful to Leo for all he had done for him that he was ready to give him all he possessed, and to help him to the utmost of his power.

Then Leo told him how he had set out to save his sister Rosamond from the clutches of the Wicked Fairy, and asked if he could tell him where to look for her. The man's face fell at this, for neither he nor any one else in the town knew where the Wicked Fairy lived; and he began sadly to say—

'I cannot tell you where to find the Wicked Fairy. I only know that she comes once a week to buy tobacco from me——'

'Oh! look, father—look!' interrupted the child in great excitement; 'see what I have seen though the green eyes! I am sure it is the Wicked Fairy!' and he handed the eyes, with which he had been playing, to his father, who straightway gave them to Leo, saying eagerly—

'Take them! take them from me; they will help you to find the Wicked Fairy.'

So Leo looked through the green eyes and saw a

picture of a dark cellar, with the figure of an old woman in it sitting huddled up on a chair by a rickety table, and smoking a short black pipe. And sitting opposite her—could it possibly be his little sister Rosamond? Rosamond, dressed in rags, with unwashed face and hands, and hair all tumbled and tangled, working as fast as her poor little fingers could move, stitching at leather gloves?

Leo nearly dropped the magic eyes in his fury when he saw the Wicked Fairy reach out her skinny hand and box Rosamond's ears, or slap her cheek.

'Where is this cellar?' he cried. 'Find it I *will*, wherever it may be!' and he rushed out into the street, calling his thanks, as he went, for the gift of the wonderful eyes, and only just catching the man's last words—

'Beware of the tobacco smoke from the black pipe——'

But which way to turn when once more in the street he did not know.

'I have wandered to the east and to the west,' he said, 'tell me, my shield, which way next?' and he raised the shield, and saw reflected in it the house just behind where he stood, with a grating above the cellar window and a set of steps leading downwards by the side of it.

'The door of the cellar will be at the bottom of those steps,' thought Leo, 'and it must be the

Wicked Fairy's cellar where she keeps Rosamond all day long, or the shield would not have shown it to me,' and he clenched his hands and ground his teeth at the thought. 'But I will make quite sure before I go into it,' he added, remembering the warning he had received, to 'beware of the smoke from the black pipe,' 'for if I too get into the power of the Wicked Fairy and forget everything, how will Rosamond be saved?'

Then he took out the green eyes and looked through them; and they showed him the Wicked Fairy standing just under the cellar window, where on the wide sill stood two jars—one containing tobacco, and the other filled with a fine brown powder.

The Wicked Fairy—nearly blind without her precious green eyes, which she thought were still safe with the spider—was fumbling with her pipe, trying clumsily to fill it with a mixture of the tobacco and brown powder from the two jars.

'Oh,' thought Leo, 'it *cannot* be the smoke from the poor old man's tobacco that causes Rosamond to forget everything when she smells it. He is honest enough. So it must be that brown powder that does all the mischief.'

He stood thinking deeply for a minute or two as he carefully put away the eyes again.

'How if I could empty the brown powder away, and fill the jar with the spice-powder that the Good Fairy gave me?' he said to himself. 'The Wicked Fairy can

hardly see, or smell, without her green eyes, and she does not know yet that the spider is dead, and the eyes in my keeping. She will not find out that the powder has been changed, and the instant she lights her pipe with the spice-powder in it, Rosamond will remember; and when I call to her, she will know my voice and come to me——'

Patiently he waited till nightfall, hiding in the house of the father of the little boy, and trying hard not to think of the ill-treatment Rosamond was enduring.

In the dusk he went out to the little garden at the back of the house, and cut a long hollow stalk from an angelica plant which he had seen growing by the gate; and when he had watched the Wicked Fairy grope her way out of the cellar and disappear—no doubt on her way to the spider to get back her eyes, as she thought—he crossed the street and knelt down by the cellar grating.

With his sword he broke a hole in the window just above the jar in which the brown powder was kept, and knocked off the lid of it. Then, pushing the hollow angelica stalk between the bars of the grating, and through the hole in the window, until it touched the jar, he blew down it with all his strength, till every grain of powder was blown out of it, and lay scattered all over the window-sill.

Then very carefully he opened the packet of spice-powder given him by the Good Fairy, and poured it

down the hollow stalk, blowing softly till the jar was filled full with spice-powder instead of the usual brown powder.

Once more he waited with the child and his father till the day broke, and the Wicked Fairy returned with Rosamond to the cellar.

She seemed restless and crosser than usual this morning, Leo thought, as he watched her—through the green eyes—go to the jars and fill her pipe with tobacco and spice-powder, thinking it was her own mixture, and, lighting it, began to puff out thick clouds of smoke as usual.

Then he could wait no longer, and darting across the street, he knelt down by the grating, and called softly—
‘Rosamond! Rosamond!’

The little girl started, and looking up for a moment, she saw Leo’s face through the window,—and remembered!

The smell of the spice-powder, which the Wicked Fairy was all unconsciously puffing out into the air, had had its usual effect upon Rosamond, save that, being still in the cellar with the Wicked Fairy, she was able to remember both lives at the same moment; and, realising for the first time who the old woman was, she did not dare to move from her chair, or to answer Leo’s call.

But Leo had seen her look up at him, and knew that she had ‘remembered.’

He waited till the Wicked Fairy had filled her pipe and smoked it a second time, so that the air was heavy with the spice perfume ; and then, creeping down the steps near the grating, he came to a rickety old door at the bottom, which he took to be the one leading into the cellar, judging by the sweet spicy smell which came through its chinks.

Once more he called softly—

‘Rosamond ! Rosamond ! come to the door.’

And through the largest chink he saw Rosamond glance quickly at the door and then at the Wicked Fairy—her fingers working fast all the time. Then suddenly and silently she dropped her work, and darted swiftly to the door, and turned the key to open it. But the key was rusty, and made a fearsome squeak in turning, which even the Wicked Fairy’s deaf ears could plainly hear ; and up she jumped in a rage, raising her stick to strike a sounding blow on poor Rosamond’s head ; when just in time the door flew open, and in rushed Leo, and sent the stick flying out of her hand with a blow from his sword, and knocked the black pipe out of her mouth at the same moment. And Rosamond, quick as lightning, snatched up the pipe and held it hidden behind her back.

The Wicked Fairy, beside herself with rage, groped for her stick and her pipe, mumbling to herself—

‘My eyes ! my eyes ! Fool that I was to lend them to that spider, even for the pleasure of hurting the boy’s father. Fool—*fool*—that I was !’

And then from out the heavy smoke that hung in the air the Good Fairy slowly appeared, and taking the green eyes from Leo and the pipe from Rosamond, she said to the Wicked Fairy—

‘Now at last is your power vanquished! for I hold the magic eyes and the pipe in my hand, and they will never be yours again.’ Then she buried them under what was left of the spice-powder in the jar, and set it alight; and the smoke rose from it in thick wreaths and curls, and twined round and round the Wicked Fairy, till she shrank and shrivelled up like the great spider, and disappeared for ever.

And when the spice-powder was all burnt out, the Good Fairy showed Rosamond a little white ash left lying at the bottom of the jar, and said to her—

‘Take it, and rub it lightly over the little places in Leo’s armour that are not yet bright.’ And when Rosamond had touched every dull place, the armour shone bright as the inner side of the shield, all over, from the top of the steel head-piece to the toe of the small mailed foot.

Then the Good Fairy touched the wall by the side of the mattress where Rosamond had so often lain, and it opened; and Rosamond led Leo up the wooden steps, and through the door into the Castle.

Great were the rejoicings when it was known how Leo had rescued his sister Rosamond from the power of the Wicked Fairy for ever. And the curious old-

fashioned suit of armour that he had worn, and his sword and shield were put up in the great hall that all might see them, and hear the story of Leo's valiant fight against the Wicked Fairy. And afterwards Rosamond worked a great cross on the breast of a white tunic for him to wear over his armour; for though it was old-fashioned, it had served him well, and as long as it fitted him he would wear no other.

And for a long time after he was always known as—
'The Little Knight of the Old Chain-Armour.'

THE PRINCESS ELIZABETH

IN a City built of cold grey stone, ugly and dull, there lived a King and Queen and their three little daughters; and with them lived also the Princess Elizabeth, half-sister to the King.

When the City was built, long ago, it stood on the banks of a beautiful wide river, whose waters flowed down to the sea, clear and pure, and were considered the finest to be found in all the world; and there lived no finer men or women anywhere than those who drank of them.

But just one hundred years ago these citizens began to grow careless, and took no trouble to keep the river pure and fresh, believing that as it had been, so it always would remain, and therefore there was no need to spend time and strength in looking after it. And the river dwindled and dwindled, and its waters became dull and choked with rubbish, till now it was no more than a narrow stream, trickling down between muddy banks some little distance from the City, and quite unfit for use of any sort.

For some reason, unknown to the Princess Elizabeth, the Queen had always disliked her ; and the King, being engrossed in the affairs of the state, and believing implicitly in his wife, knew nothing of her treatment of the Princess, nor how she was neglected, and left to spend whole long days by herself. The result of this was, that the poor little Princess began to believe that she must in some way be different from other people, and to wonder what it was about her that made every one shun her.

The three other little Princesses had one of the best suites of rooms in the Palace for their nurseries. They had nurses and governesses to attend upon and teach them, numberless pretty garments to wear, and more toys and pleasures than they were able to enjoy ; and yet they never seemed happy nor content, and quarrelled continually amongst themselves.

The Princess Elizabeth was never allowed to share in any of their toys and pleasures. Her one room was on the sunless side of the house, and her dresses were made in the plainest possible fashion, always of the same coarse white material in summer, and grey homespun in winter ; and she had no attendant of her own at all.

Sometimes she wondered, as she let down her red-gold hair before the glass, and looked at its waves and curls as it fell below her waist, whether its unusual length and colour could be the cause of her being so much



She sat down to work at her embroidery

disliked by every one ; and once she took a pair of scissors out of her work-bag to cut it off short. But though she had used the scissors just before for cutting out some pictures for one of the little Princesses, and therefore she knew they were in good order, they now refused to be opened, and became so heavy in her hand that she was obliged to put them back in the bag again.

She tried another pair, and then another, but not one could she find that would cut off her beautiful hair.

Then she looked at her long dark eyelashes and delicately marked eyebrows, and wondered if she would be liked better if they were not so dark. She tried to paint them, but no paint would adhere to them, and no scissors would cut them off. So she rolled up her hair again, and went out into the Palace garden, trying to blink back the tears that *would* well up in her grey eyes, and sat down to work at her embroidery by herself, and to wonder what she could do to make herself look more like other people.

But her hands lay idle in her lap, amongst the folds of her richly coloured work,—the only bright spot in that dull place,—and her lips moved, as she repeated to herself two lines of a poem she had learnt that morning—

‘ ———far away in some region old,
Where the rivers wander o’er sands of gold.’

‘I should like to see them. Oh! I *should* like to see them, and go away from here,’ she said slowly; and then she sat up suddenly and listened, for a series of most unusual sounds had reached her ears from the square outside the high wall of the garden.

Gathering up her work, she ran to the great gates, and stood looking at a crowd of people that had collected round a herald, who, after blowing a call on his horn to attract attention, made the following announcement—

‘To all those whom it may concern, His Majesty the King desires it to be made known, that he will give the half of his Kingdom to any one of his people who will restore to the City the pure water that used to flow down the sandy river-bed by the side of the City wall, and that has been gradually drying up during the last hundred years.’

The Princess turned to the gate-keeper who stood at the gate, and asked if he knew why the King had suddenly become so anxious about the river? and he answered—

‘Your Royal Highness, there is not enough water to supply the City, neither is that in the river fit for use. His Majesty has done everything he can to procure a fresh supply, but has, so far, failed, and he dreads a water famine, and a pestilence among the people.’

‘But that would be terrible!’ said the Princess, as she turned away.

All night long, as she lay in bed, she dreamt of rushing waters and broad rivers; or of narrow muddy streams, and then of illness among the people, and terrible thirst; and every now and then through her dreams, she seemed to hear the words—

‘——far away in some region old,
Where the rivers wander o’er sands of gold.’

When she awoke in the morning her first thought was—

‘Our river must once have been like those in the poem. I wonder why it has changed? Where does it come from? There may be something wrong at its source. I wonder if the King knows?’

She dressed hurriedly, and went to ask permission to see the King; but she only received an answer to the effect that His Majesty was too deeply engaged with public affairs to see her that day.

Again and again she tried to see him to ask more about the river, but without success; and at last she wrote him a little note, and succeeded in getting it taken to him, and received in answer a slip of paper on which was written—

‘The source of the river lies in the Black Mountain. No one has, so far, ever succeeded in reaching it.’

The Princess read this as she sat in the garden.

‘Why has no one succeeded?’ she said aloud.

‘He who would reach the source of the river must go alone, unarmed——’ came the answer.

The Princess looked this way and that, and up and down, but could see no one; she did not feel much surprised, for she just thought to herself—

‘I must be dreaming awake, I suppose. “Alone and unarmed,”’ she repeated slowly. ‘Oh, that must mean that those who have tried must have started wrong then. Well that sounds a good answer to my question’; and then, glad of anything to make a variety in her dull life, she asked another question, hoping to get an answer—it was so refreshing to have a conversation, even if only with nobody.

‘Which is the right way to start?’ she asked, and, listening eagerly for the answer, she heard—

‘Plait together the skeins of silk on your knee, make them into a rope, and give one end of it to me.’

‘Making the rope will be easy enough,’ she thought, ‘but how I am to give the end of it to some one who doesn’t seem to be here—or only to have a voice and nothing else—I don’t quite know.’

Then she set to work to plait the silks and make a rope. When it was finished she held it up, and said—

‘Is this right?’

And then one end of the rope was taken out of her hand, and she felt it tighten as though some one pulled it, and she rose to her feet and began to follow where it appeared to lead.

She passed through the gates of the Palace and across the square, and so to the City wall near which, in the old days, the river used to flow.

As she neared the wall, she saw a little grey door—so much the colour of the stone that it was almost invisible till she came quite close to it—and through this she went, led by the silken rope. She was glad she had not been obliged to go through the City gate, for the gate-keeper would have been sure to question her, and possibly she would have been sent back to the Palace again with an escort of soldiers.

The road outside the wall was rough and dusty, and thistles grew by the side of it. She followed this till she reached the stream in its muddy banks—all that was now left of the broad river that used to flow by the City—and then turned to follow its course.

The path lay on the top of one of the banks, and the Princess had to be very careful not to lose her footing on the slippery mud. Once she did slip, and thought for a moment that she was falling into the stream, but the silken rope slid round her waist and pulled her on to her feet again.

Once a snake reared its head out of the long thin grass at her side, and hissed at her, but the rope was round its neck before it could harm her, and it lay dead at the bottom of the bank.

The Princess travelled on by the side of the stream till she reached the foot of the Black Mountain; and

then came a rough climb for her through a rocky gorge which led at last to the mouth of a huge dark cavern, or passage, through which the little stream trickled.

‘This must be the source then, I suppose,’ thought the Princess. But the silken rope drew her on into the cavern, and she heard the voice saying—

‘The source of the river is not here—it lies deep in the heart of the mountain.’

So the Princess stumbled on in the dim light, holding always the end of the silken rope in her hand, and listening to the trickle of water at her feet. The darkness deepened as she went, till at last she could see nothing at all, and walking was very difficult over the rough floor of the rock passage.

Once she caught her foot against a low rock, and putting out both hands to try to save herself from falling, she dropped the end of the silken rope. She groped about on the floor, but failed to find it, and then in the darkness lost her bearings and did not know which way she had been going—which led forward, and which back again to the entrance of the passage.

Then for the first time she felt frightened, and a little sob rose in her throat, as she sat on the ground not knowing what to do next.

She could still hear the water trickling near her, and putting out her hand, she dipped her fingers into it, and then remembered that the water ran down towards the mouth of the passage, and, therefore, her way must be in

the opposite direction; and she thought of the water famine that was surely coming to the City if the source of the river could not be gained, and she rose and tried to follow the path once more.

As she worked her way round a huge boulder, she saw a faint ray of light coming through a crevice in the high roof of the cave above her, and for one moment she thought she saw a little shadowy figure and the gleam of golden wings, and at the same time she felt the end of the silken rope in her hand once more.

On she trudged again in the darkness, no longer frightened, and saying to herself—

‘I always thought there must be a fairy at the other end of the rope, and now I know she is there, for I saw her golden wings.’

After a time the path became smoother, and she felt her feet sink, with each step she took, in soft sand.

It became lighter, and there was a sound of rushing waters. And now she could see she had reached an immense cave, where rivers of clear water flowed from springs which bubbled up through the sand in the centre, and disappeared in all directions through dark holes, or passages, in the rock walls, like the one through which she had just come.

And then it dawned upon her that she had reached the source of the river at last, and had now to find out why there was so little water flowing to the City where her brother was King.

Directly opposite the path up which she had come was a deep hollow in the sand, and through a narrow channel leading out of it trickled the little stream she had followed so far.

‘There must be a spring at the bottom of the hollow,’ thought the Princess, ‘but why does not the water bubble up as it does from the other springs?’ and she bent over to look for the cause.

At the bottom, where the spring should have been bubbling and sending up a river of water, the Princess could see that the mouth of the spring was choked with rubbish of all sorts, and in the middle of it all was a huge stone, shaped like a toad with great, shining, cold green eyes of glass.

‘I see now,’ said the Princess; ‘that great ugly stone is sitting on the rubbish and choking down the water, so that only a very little can pass. I wonder if I can move it away?’

She slid down the soft sand to the bottom of the hollow, and stooped to try and lift the stone, but she could not move it one hair’s-breadth.

Then she tried to pass the silken rope round it, thinking to be able, perhaps, to pull the stone to one side with it, but it was not long enough to reach round.

‘What *shall* I do?’ she said aloud, looking about her for something to add to the rope to lengthen it.

Then she heard the fairy’s voice again—

‘Cut off your own long hair and add it to the rope.’

The Princess remembered how she had tried to cut it off once before, and she had felt so disappointed when the scissors had refused to open ; and now she was glad they had refused, and she let down her hair, and felt in her work-bag, which hung at her side, for her scissors.

There they were, and this time they worked without any trouble, and soon a beautiful long thick plait of hair lay on the sand at the feet of the Princess, and she began to try to tie it and the rope together.

This was not an easy thing to do ; but, while the Princess was fumbling at the knot, the strands of hair and silk began to twist themselves in and out of each other, till soon they were fastened so firmly together that the Princess was able to pass them round the stone frog and begin to pull.

She leant the whole of her weight on the rope, and slowly the stone began to move, and as it moved, the spring below began to push its waters up through the rubbish, and, gaining in strength, lifted the stone right out of the hollow and flung it aside. And then, before the Princess could escape, the rush of water was so great that she was carried away by it, and washed down the rocky passage that she had passed up earlier in the day ; and before she quite realised what had happened, she found herself floating down towards the City on a broad river that 'wandered o'er sands of gold,' and heard the shouts of the people as they rushed from the City to quench their burning thirst.

The three little Princesses were the first to see the Princess Elizabeth, and the youngest of them—that one for whom she had been cutting out pictures just before the scissors had refused to cut off her hair—ran into the water waist-deep to try to reach her, as the current washed her nearer the shore.

And then, seeing the silken rope, which Princess Elizabeth still held, floating by in the water, she caught the other end of it, and held it till the King came and lifted the Princess Elizabeth in his arms, and carried her home himself.

And never again did the people of that City neglect their wonderful river ; and the Princess Elizabeth found that even when her beautiful hair grew long again, it made no difference to their gratitude and love for her, and they called the river after her name—‘ The Princess Elizabeth.’

MISS ANICE

CHAPTER I

JUST before the end of the term, illness of an infectious kind had broken out in the large family of the Raeburns, so Gwen, the youngest but two, could not go home from school before the middle of the summer holidays.

She was just eleven years old, and had been looking forward to the holidays, and to seeing her two big brothers again, with great delight ; and her disappointment, when she heard that she could not go straight home, but was first to be sent to spend two long weeks with an old servant of her mother's, was almost more than she could bear patiently.

Gwen was very fond of old Jane ; but there was no one of her own age to play with, and nothing much to do at Jane's house, for the tiny bit of garden at the back of the small house was quite new, and nothing seemed to wish to grow in it, and there was not even a summer-house to play in, nor a tree of any kind to climb.

Jane was a thin little old woman, with a pointed nose and scanty grey hair ; she was nervous, and 'a bit fussy,' as Gwen used to say, and *very* particular as to dirty boots and untidy hair ; still she was kind to Gwen, and did what she could to make her happy.

Her house stood at the end of a newly-built, ugly little row, placed at right angles to the 'big house' garden, so that the high wall of the latter ran down one side of Jane's garden, and, according to Jane, was one of the few advantages of the place, as it kept 'them bitin' eastysome winds off nicely.'

The first morning after Gwen arrived, she explored the whole house and garden in less than half an hour, and then, for want of something to do, followed Jane about with a doleful face, hindering her at her work, and feeling very homesick and dull ; till at last Jane said—

'Now, Miss Gwen, if you'll just set yourself down a bit in the front room and look at a book, and leave me to finish cleanin' up quiet like, I'll put on my things and take you round to see the cemetery after we've had our dinners ; there's lots of fine tombs there, marble and such-like, and interestin' readin' on them too, and a nice seat to sit down on by where the chapel is' ; and so saying she shut Gwen into the front room, where the blinds were always drawn down to keep the sun off the carpet, and where the windows were seldom opened for fear of the dust from the road.

Gwen wandered round this dreary room, looking at

the stuffed birds on the painted mantel-piece, and turning over the leaves of the photograph album, which stood on a green wool mat on the polished table, and which was the only book in the room.

She pulled faces at the ugly photographs, feeling that everything was hideous and too tiresome to be borne; and finally she slammed down the thick cover of the album, and flung herself round in a fit of temper, kicking and nearly falling over a bead-work footstool (one of Jane's most precious possessions), and knocking down all the fire-irons with a loud clatter.

She was dreadfully afraid Jane would hear the noise and come in and scold her, so, opening the door softly, she listened, and satisfying herself that Jane must be safely upstairs 'doing' the bedrooms, she fled down the passage and out into the garden, and began throwing stones at a broken bottle which she stuck on a tall stick.

Presently she heard a voice which certainly was not Jane's.

'Miss Anice! Miss Anice!' it called.

Gwen looked round, but could see no one, and the voice went on calling—

'Miss Anice! Miss Anice! where are you?'

'Where indeed?' thought Gwen; 'she must be on the other side of that high wall, I should think, there is nowhere else where she could hide. I wonder what *is* on the other side of that high wall? and who "Miss Anice" can be?'

Gwen ran up and down by the side of the wall, looking for some way by which she could climb to the top and look over it, but there were no holes in the good red bricks of which it was built, and no rough places to cling to; and there was no tree or climbing plant growing on Jane's side of the wall, though Gwen could see a thick mass of ivy lying along the top of it, showing that the other side must be well covered with greenery.

Gwen said nothing to Jane about the voice she had heard from the other side of the wall, but all the time they were walking to the cemetery in the afternoon she was thinking about it, and wondering how she could get to the top of the wall and look over.

'Jane hasn't got a ladder,' she said to herself, 'and a chair wouldn't be high enough; *two* chairs wouldn't even. I mean to get there somehow though, and find out who "Miss Anice" is.'

And then she fell to wondering what 'Miss Anice' was like; whether she was dark or fair, whether tall or short, how old she was, and whether she could climb trees.

Gwen herself was big for her age and rather heavy, and though fond of climbing, was not very clever at it; she liked best to think of 'Miss Anice' as able to climb fairly well only, just well enough to follow where she, Gwen, would lead; she wished her to be about her own age, perhaps a month or two younger; pretty, but not

too pretty, and possessed of any number of toys and games and 'things to do,' which she would share with Gwen if they ever managed to meet.

Once the thought came into her mind that perhaps 'Miss Anice' was only a grown-up lady, but that was so disappointing an idea that she quickly put it aside and would think no more of it.

For the next two days Gwen spent most of the time in the garden, much to Jane's surprise ; but as the latter said to herself—

'So long as Miss Gwen is happy, she's better out than in, and leaves me time to get done quiet.'

One morning, after breakfast, Gwen was craning her head out of her bedroom window trying to get a peep over the wall, when she heard sounds in the road below, and saw a hand-cart, on which had been laid a set of window-cleaners' ladders, overturned on the footpath ; the wheel had come off the cart, and Gwen heard the man say to the lad who was with him—

'We'll have to take t'cart back, 'taint no manner of use trying to go no further with only one wheel. Lean them ladders agin the wall inside that little gate, will 'ee? an' look sharp now ; don't be all day a-starin' at 'em.'

'Ladders,' thought Gwen, 'and "agin the high wall"! Just the very thing I want, and Jane is safe away at the back of the house too.'

She watched the placing of the ladders, and the

departure of the man and boy, and then cautiously slipped down the stairs and out at the front door.

Two of the ladders were too short to be of any use, but the third, she thought, would do ; only it was very near the road, and the top of it ran into the branches of an overhanging tree. The ladder was too heavy for her to move, so up it she went as it stood. At the top she found the branches of the tree so thick that she could hardly see through them, so she pushed and wriggled herself under them on to the top of the wall, and lay on her face amongst the ivy, unintentionally giving such a kick to the ladder in doing so, that it fell to the ground, making a dreadful noise.

Gwen lay very still on the top of the wall, hoping Jane would not hear the noise, and quite forgetting that now she had no means of getting down again.

She was quite out of sight from below, and, after waiting a few moments and finding no one came to see what had happened, she pulled herself farther along the wall, and then, putting one hand on a lower branch of the tree, leant over to try to get a better view of this side of the wall.

The ivy was very thick, and Gwen, not knowing the width of the wall and where it ended, leaving nothing but ivy, leant over too far, lost her balance, and fell crashing through the overhanging ivy and the smaller branches of the tree, and landed on her back on a soft heap of dead leaves.

She was rather startled, but not otherwise any the worse for her tumble.

She got up and looked about her.

'Well, I'm here now,' she said, 'right *over* the wall, so I may as well see what is to be seen, and find out who "Miss Anice" is too. I can't go back the way I came anyhow.'

She slipped down from the great heap of dead leaves, and creeping between some big laurel bushes, found herself at the edge of a green lawn, or what had once been a lawn, but was now, through long neglect, more like a rough field than anything else.

At the far side of this stood a great red brick house, very old, and rather tumble-down, Gwen thought.

She saw no one about, and everything was very still and peaceful; a large grey cat lay basking in the sun on the steps of an old sundial in the middle of the lawn, and there was a sleepy sound of bees humming and buzzing as they flew from flower to flower in the overgrown borders, where the rose-trees and lavender-bushes were running wild, and a few old-fashioned flowers that had not been killed by the winter frosts cropped up here and there among the weeds.

Gwen thought it was the loveliest place to play in that she had ever seen. She went cautiously forward, and came upon a summer-house, all falling to pieces, but still 'splendid to play house in,' as Gwen said to herself.

She poked about all round it first, and then looked in through the window.

It was rather dark inside after the bright sunlit garden, and she was a little startled to hear a small voice saying—

‘Who are you? This is my house, my very own. If you’ll wait a minute, perhaps I’ll invite you to come in.’

‘I wish you would,’ said Gwen. And then she saw, perched high up on a rafter, a little figure which quickly swung itself down to the ground, and came towards Gwen at the window.

‘There isn’t a door now,’ said the child; ‘it has fallen down and the opening is filled up; but you can come in through the window. I always do.’

But Gwen was bigger than the other little girl, and she found, after a good many tries, that she could not squeeze in through the small window; so the little girl slipped through it herself and stood outside, and Gwen eyed her from top to toe, and decided she was ‘just lovely.’

She was very slim, and shorter than Gwen, and had brown hair and eyes, and her bonnie little face and her hands were burnt brown in the sun; her teeth were small and white, and looked like two rows of pearls when she smiled.

She began hopping about on tip-toe from one foot to the other in front of Gwen, laughing in little happy

chuckles as she looked up into Gwen's round, rosy face and said—

'You *are* big, aren't you? I'm eleven; how old are you? *Quite* old?'

'No,' said Gwen, 'I'm only just eleven, like you. Are you—are you "Miss Anice"?''

'Yes, I am; how did you know?' asked the child.

'I heard some one calling "Miss Anice" from the other side of the wall yesterday,' said Gwen, 'and to-day I climbed up a ladder there was, to the top of the wall, and then fell over, and couldn't get back again. So I *had* to come and find you, you see.'

'I am glad you fell,' said Anice. 'What is *your* name?'

'Just Gwen,' answered Gwen. 'Where do you live?' she went on; 'in that *big* house?'

'Me and Mrs. Harris lives there,' said Anice, 'and the ancestors, of course. Come and see'; and she danced off across the grass towards the old house, followed by Gwen.

'Mrs. Harris is washing to-day, so we can go anywhere we like, and she won't bother. This way,' she said, as she climbed in through a window.

Gwen scrambled in after her, getting rather hot and red in the face, as she owned to herself that Anice was by far the better climber of the two.

'What are ancestors?' she asked, as they went down the great hall of the house together.

‘Oh, the people who lived here before,’ said Anice ; ‘old, old, old uncles and aunts and grandfathers and grandmothers, you know.’

‘And no children?’ asked Gwen, with an odd feeling of disappointment.

‘Oh yes, lots,’ said Anice ; ‘stop a minute and I’ll just tell you about things. It’s my uncle’s house, but he’s never here, and Mrs. Harris takes care of me. You see, this is the hall, and the big grand staircase is through that big door at the end, and the grand best rooms are there too. I can’t open this big door ; this is *my* way upstairs,’ and she slipped behind a big oak settle which stood near the hearth, and running her little brown hand along a ledge in the panelling of the wall, found a spring or a handle or something—Gwen could not see what—and opened a little narrow door through which she went, calling to Gwen to follow.

Gwen could only just squeeze through ; and when Anice had closed the door again, it was so dark in the little passage in which they stood, that she could see nothing.

Anice took her hand, and said—

‘This way, up these stairs’ ; and Gwen stumbled up after her, and presently Anice pushed open another small door, and they stepped through it into a cupboard full of long dresses, and through that into a long wide passage or landing.

'Mrs. Harris doesn't know about that way up here,' said Anice; 'it's a secret that I found out one day myself. These are the nicest rooms down this way. Come along,' and she ran half-way down another passage, and then stopped, and turning to Gwen with finger on lip, she whispered—

'Hush! this is the ancestor nursery. I always tip-toe in here; we might disturb the ancestor baby, you know.'

'Is he alive?' asked Gwen in a whisper.

Anice did not answer; she had softly opened the door and crept into the room. It was large and sunny, and beside the high fender stood an old oak cradle and a low nursing chair, and over the cradle there lay a coverlet, old and torn and dusty.

The door of a huge old cupboard stood just ajar, and Gwen could see a collection of toys and books inside, but she was most interested in the cradle.

'Anice,' she said in a low voice, 'is there really a baby in the cradle?'

'I haven't looked yet,' said Anice, 'because I like to pretend he's there, and sit on the chair and rock him. Let's look *now*, shall we?' and she lifted a corner of the dusty coverlet in her hand, and Gwen and she peeped under it into the cradle.

First they found a pile of baby clothes, neatly folded, and wrapped in a small sheet; and then a toy wooden sword, and then a coloured sketch of a fine-looking boy,

at the foot of which picture were the words written in a child's large round hand—

‘This is me,
Willoughby Lea.’

‘It's the ancestor boy in the picture in the hall,’ exclaimed Anice; ‘he's got the same funny clothes on, and this sword too; and this was his nursery when he was a baby, and this was his cradle. I'm glad I know about him. Come along up to the garrets and I'll show you what he did once’; and she ran out of the room again, and up another long flight of stairs to the garrets above.

It was very dusty and not very light up here, and the floor was worm-eaten, and in some places the boards had fallen away altogether, leaving great holes, and showing the rafters underneath.

Anice flitted lightly along, and Gwen followed as well as she could, till they came to one room where there were no boards at all on the rafters. Anice walked easily along a rafter, balancing herself with her arms outstretched; but this was too much for Gwen, and she had to sit down, and slide herself along it that way as well as she could.

She reached the end just in time to see Anice disappear through a hole in the wall, and when she looked through the hole, there was Anice standing on the top of a round tower, calling to her to be quick and come out there too.

Gwen struggled through the hole, and stood by Anice on the tower.

‘This is the clock tower,’ explained Anice, ‘and it’s near the laundry—I mean the laundry is at the bottom of it; and Mrs. Harris is there, so we must be quiet.’

‘What did the ancestor boy do, though, Anice?’ asked Gwen, ‘you said you’d show me.’

‘Yes, I’m going to,’ said Anice, ‘if we can open this door.’

She was pushing with all her strength at a heavy oak door which was not quite closed, and, at last, with the help of Gwen’s greater weight, they pushed the door open wide enough for both of them to get through; but, unfortunately, when their weight was no longer pushing against it, it slipped out of their hands and swung back into its place with a loud clang, as though it had been a swing-door, and they both exclaimed, ‘We shall *never* be able to pull that door open again now it is quite shut.’

‘Well, never mind,’ said Anice; ‘we’ll go down the stairs and see where they go to.’

As before, Anice went first and Gwen followed. Round and round and round they went, down the corkscrew stairs, the steps getting more and more worn and crumbling the farther they went, till at last Anice stopped short, and exclaimed—

‘Oh! there aren’t any more steps! and we’re not at the bottom yet. What *shall* we do?’

Gwen was getting quite frightened, and didn't answer, so Anice went on—

‘Go back a bit and let's sit down and think.’

They went up a few steps and sat down together ; Gwen nervously shuffling her feet about amongst the loose bits of stone and mortar on the step below her, and wondering what they should do if they could not get out of the tower before bedtime, and how they could get something to eat, for she was already feeling very hungry ; and Anice with her elbows on her knees and her chin on her hands, and her forehead all crumpled with frowns in her efforts to ‘think.’

‘What the ancestor boy did,’ she presently began slowly, ‘was when they put the clock up first, when it was quite new, and there were ropes hanging down outside the tower to pull things up with that belonged to the clock. He was outside, and the clock men forgot, and shut the door and left him, and the only way he could get down was by the ropes outside. So first he took off his sword and his coat, and then he wrapped the sleeves of his coat round his hands, and took hold of one of the ropes, and slid down it to the bottom.’

‘And was he *killed*?’ asked Gwen in a shaky whisper.

‘Oh no, of course not,’ said Anice ; ‘but his coat-sleeves were—I mean they got worn out.’

‘Let's go up to the door again,’ said Gwen, ‘and see if we can open it, and go back the way we came.’

So they went up again to the top of the tower, but try as they would, they could not make the door budge an inch. Finding it was quite hopeless to think of going back through the garrets, they turned to go down the stairs again, and as they went, Gwen said—

‘What are these sort of ropy things we can see in the wall, Anice?’

‘They’re the ropes the clock-weights hang on,’ said Anice; ‘they go up and down in that long kind of box in the wall of the tower.’

‘But,’ said Gwen, ‘just before where the steps stop there isn’t a box any more, and I can see one of the ropes hanging down loose in the air.’

‘So it does!’ exclaimed Anice, and, quick as thought, she had seized it with hands and feet and begun to slide down it, calling out to Gwen to wait till she reached the bottom.

Luckily for her the clock had nearly run down, so that she landed on the top of the huge weight on the level of the top of the door at the bottom of the tower, and through the chink she could see Mrs. Harris busy with her washing.

She kicked at the door, and called out—

‘Mrs. Harris! Mrs. Harris! please open the door and help me down.’

Mrs. Harris gave a great start of surprise, and upset her tin of soft-soap, and her packets of starch, and blue into the copper which was full of boiling water

and clothes; and looking round everywhere, she muttered—

‘Miss Anice again! She’ll be the death of me, she will, one of these days. And that’s my last tin of soap, and my last bit of starch and blue——’

‘Mrs. Harris! Mrs. *Harris*!’ called Anice again, ‘do open the tower door.’

‘The tower door!’ exclaimed Mrs. Harris, vainly trying to fish the soap-tin out of the boiling water before it was all wasted. ‘Well I never! it’ll be the chimney next, I suppose. You never know whether she’ll come on you from below or above, or——’

‘Mrs. Harris! *Mrs. Harris*! be quick!’ called Anice again; and Mrs. Harris, now thoroughly aware where the voice came from, left her tin in the copper, and hurried to the tower door, and, opening it, peered round in the dim light for Anice.

‘Miss Anice, Miss Anice, are you really here?’ said poor Mrs. Harris; and then, as she came just under the clock-weight, Anice leant down and whipped off her cap, and said—

‘Yes, I really am here, Mrs. Harris dear, but I can’t get down by myself; and there’s Gwen up there too, and she’ll be coming down in a minute. Help me down; help me down quick, please.’

Mrs. Harris gave a startled scream, and put up her hands to her capless head, seeing for the first time a little pair of black legs dangling from the clock-weight above her.

‘Help you down indeed!’ she said; ‘no such thing. There you stay till you give me back my cap, Miss Anice. Not even in my own locked bedroom will I appear without my cap, day nor night. And where you’ve come from, and why you aren’t killed every day of your life, it’s beyond me to say.’

Then Anice handed her her cap with a little chuckle of fun, and she went off, pressing it on to her head wrong way before,—‘that mazed as never was,’ as she said afterwards to Jane, over a dish of tea—to fetch the steps.

When Anice had safely landed on the floor, she called to Gwen to slip down the rope as she had done, saying it wasn’t far to come, and she could do it easily.

But Gwen was really frightened up there by herself, and kept saying—

‘Oh! I daren’t! I daren’t!’ but by dint of a great deal of coaxing from Anice she at last got so far as to clutch the rope, and call out—

‘Oh! Anice, I *nearly* went! I *nearly* went,’ but still she remained where she was, till Mrs. Harris promised to catch her if she fell; and then she made another wild clutch with hands and legs at the rope, and landed, at last, in Mrs. Harris’s arms, with a gasp of relief, very red in the face and nearly crying.

Just at that moment there was a whirr and a clatter that echoed through the tower, and the great clock struck one.

'Oh! oh! what's that?' exclaimed Gwen, clinging to kind old Mrs. Harris's arm.

'Only one o'clock,' said Anice, laughing.

'Oh, Anice, I didn't know it was so late,' said Gwen. 'I wonder if Jane will be very angry?'

'Jane?' said Mrs. Harris, half to herself. 'Oh, so this is Jane's young lady, is it?' and then aloud she said—

'Jane won't like the mess you are in, my dear, but you run along quick and tell her you're all right, and Mrs. Harris hopes you'll come again to-morrow. There's no good in two children playing two sides of the wall when they might be together, as I can see.'

'But how shall I get back to Jane?' asked Gwen anxiously. 'I can't get over the wall again; there's no ladder on the other side now.'

'I'll take you through the gate,' said Anice; 'come along!'

They ran together down the drive, settling to meet again to-morrow morning, directly after breakfast, at the gate.

Jane's house was very near the big gates, and as Gwen appeared round the corner, she saw Jane standing at her front door anxiously peering up and down the road for her, and exclaiming with horror when she saw her—

'Miss Gwen, Miss Gwen, where *have* you been? and *what* a state you are in, to be sure! That dress'll

have to go to the wash at once, and only put on clean this morning too!—and where's your hat? and what will your poor mamma say? and I'm thankful you're safe, but I'll not let you out of my sight again, that's certain'; and she fussed and fussed, and gave Gwen no chance of getting a word in edgeways to explain where she had been, and that she was intending to go to the big house again next day, and stay till after tea, by Mrs. Harris's invitation.

That evening, after Gwen was in bed, Mrs. Harris dropped in to see Jane, and told her where Gwen had been during the day, and asked her to let her come in again.

So next morning Gwen set off, very happily, to meet Anice at the gate.

CHAPTER II

BEFORE they reached the house a few large drops of rain had fallen, so they decided to play indoors; and Gwen begged Anice to tell her more about what the ancestor children used to do.

Anice took Gwen up her 'secret staircase' again, and so along the upper passages to the top of the great staircase; here there was no heavy door to bar their way, as the big one leading from the hall below had done.

At the bottom of the stairs Anice turned into a long

room, which she told Gwen was the picture-gallery ; and here she told her stories about what had happened to some of her ancestors, whose pictures hung there, which tales she had read in her Uncle Andrew's ' Book of the Lea Family.'

'And this is my favourite,' she said, when near the end of the room, stopping before what seemed to Gwen to be the prettiest picture there.

It was one of a little girl in a pink brocade dress, feeding a white cockatoo which stood on a perch, with a bit of cake.

'Who was she? and what did she do, Anice?' asked Gwen.

'She was Rosabelle Lea,' said Anice, 'and the cockatoo was her very own, and it could talk a little. And once some one told her about the secret passage that starts through a trap-door in the floor in the library, and she went there alone one day, with the cockatoo, to look for it. She lifted all the mats up, and felt about on the floor and moved things, and then stamped to see if there was a hollow sound anywhere ; and just near the fireplace there was one, under where a big chair stood that she had pushed away. And there was a spring in the floor that she didn't know about, so when she stamped just there, the trap-door opened, and she fell through——'

'And got hurt?' interrupted Gwen quickly.

'Yes, she broke her leg and hurt her back,' said

Anice, 'and was lost, too, for a long time, till they heard the cockatoo screaming out—"Trap-door! trap-door!" and so they found her. And she had to lie on a sofa always after that, and they fastened up the trap-door.'

'Oh, so we can't see it then?' asked Gwen in a disappointed tone.

'Yes, we can,' said Anice, 'and I believe we could p'raps open it too. You see, the floor is very old now, and the boards feel loose and rattly; there's a big chest over them that I can't move by myself——'

'But we might move it together, perhaps, Anice, couldn't we?' said Gwen eagerly; '*do* let's try.'

'Yes, I thought of that,' said Anice; 'and first we'll get Mrs. Harris's lantern; trap-door places are always dark.'

It took some little time to get the lantern and a box of matches, but they succeeded in doing it without bothering Mrs. Harris.

The chest proved *very* heavy, and with all their pushing and struggling they only managed to move it about an inch. This was disappointing; and Gwen's face was beginning to look doleful, and Anice's forehead was crumpling into frowns, when she suddenly began to wonder what was inside the chest, and whether it was anything that could be moved out of it to make it lighter.

No sooner did the thought come into her mind, than

she pounced on the hasp of the chest, and, not without some little difficulty, managed to pull it out ; and then together the two little girls opened the lid.

The first thing they saw was a piece of an old suit of armour, and a great long sword ; and underneath these some big books, piled four or five deep, one on the top of another.

‘ We’ll take these out,’ said Anice at once.

‘ Dare you ?’ asked Gwen.

‘ Why not ?’ said Anice, staring at her.

‘ Well they’re grown-up things,’ said Gwen, fidgeting about, ‘ and *we’re* not allowed to touch things like that. But I suppose you know ; p’raps it’s different here,’ she added, wishing she had not said anything about it.

‘ Yes, it’s different here,’ said Anice, and turned quickly to the chest.

It was hard work lifting out the heavy books ; but when at last the chest was empty, it was fairly easy to move ; and as soon as the trap-door was uncovered, both little girls were on their knees at once, poking their fingers up and down the cracks between the old boards, and pressing every knob and rusty nail-head they could see.

‘ The boards are quite loose and wobbly,’ said Anice.

‘ And the nails are quite rusty and old,’ chimed in Gwen. ‘ If there’s a bolt or anything underneath to

hold the trap-door up, that must be rusty too, and might break. Suppose we jump on the trap-door, Anice.'

'And fall through like Rosabelle?' said Anice. 'You can if you like, Gwen, you're heavier than me; I shan't. We might push one end of the chest on to it, and then get one on each side, and see if we can lift it up and drop it on to the trap-door; the legs look strong enough, they're so short and thick; I don't think they'll break.'

'Oh yes, let's try that,' said Gwen eagerly, and evidently much relieved at not having to follow out her own plan.

But even when they had succeeded in dropping one end of the chest on the trap-door, more than once, it still did not give way, though the boards had creaked, and both children had heard a hopeful 'cracky sound.'

'Now we'll throw the books and things in all at this end, Gwen,' said Anice; 'throw hard!'

During this process more cracks were heard, and finally Gwen climbed into the chest and jumped up and down; and if it had not been that she was inside the chest, she would after all have fallen just as Rosabelle did, when with one crunching crack the trap-door gave way, and the chest slipped right across the hole, half in and half out of it.

'Oh! oh!' cried Gwen, jumping out of the chest.

'Hurrah!' cried Anice, 'you've done it, Gwen.'

Now, quick, out with the books again, and then we'll push back the chest, and then——!'

This did not take very long, and then the candle was lighted in the lantern and lowered into the hole.

'We can't see much that way,' said Anice; 'I'm going down. Hold the lantern, Gwen.'

And peering about she soon found a series of stones that stuck out in the form of a rough ladder, or stairway, at one side of the hole, and down these she cautiously made her way, till she reached the ground. The hole was really only just deep enough for a very tall man to stand upright in, and Gwen handed down the lantern to Anice, and quickly followed her.

While Gwen was climbing down, Anice was exploring.

'This way, Gwen,' she called; 'here's the passage.'

'What is it like, Anice?' asked Gwen nervously.

'It's a bit cobwebby, they're all over my face; and I *think* I trod on a frog just then,' said Anice; 'but it's awfully jolly and interesting. Come along, Gwen, I want to see where it goes to.'

'But the frogs!' said Gwen, hanging back. 'Are there lots of them, Anice? are they hopping? Oh, let's go back; *do* come back, Anice!' and Gwen turned again to the steps to go back to the library, out of the way of the frogs.

'Silly-billy,' called Anice from the passage; 'I only said I *thought* I'd trodden on one. I dare say it wasn't

one really—or only an ancestor one,’ she added to herself, ‘for it *was* rather soft and squeezy when I put my foot on it.’

So Gwen screwed up her courage, though still not feeling quite sure about the frogs, and started after Anice, who held the lantern so that the light shone on the rough floor for her. And together they stumbled along some way, the ground getting damper and damper, and the walls beginning to drip with water, till Anice, who was in front with the lantern, exclaimed—

‘There’s a sort of pond here, Gwen; I wonder how deep it is? I’m going to wade in and see’; and in she went till the water came up to her ankles.

‘*You’d* better take your shoes and stockings off, Gwen,’ she said, ‘mine are too wet to bother about now.’

This Gwen proceeded to do, leaning against the passage wall, as there was nowhere to sit, and making the back of her overall all wet and green as she did so; and then, with many little shivers and cries of ‘Oh! oh! it *is* cold! and it *does* feel slimy!’ she paddled through the water, and reached Anice at the other side of the pond. She was just going to put on her shoes and stockings again, when there was a splash in the pond, and to Gwen’s horror she saw a great big frog swimming towards her.

Anice laughed with delight, and danced about, making the light from the lantern dance too, till poor

Gwen nearly cried, and dropped one of her stockings into the water. She snatched it up again quickly, and stuffed it all dripping into one of her shoes, and called to Anice—

‘Oh, come along; *do* come along quickly, Anice, before the frog jumps out of the water!’

But before Anice could speak, or Gwen do more than clutch wildly at Anice’s arm, both children were clinging together, startled at a sudden loud noise that seemed to come from the far end of the passage, and sounded like several coal-carts being upset at once, and rumbling and tumbling downstairs.

‘Oh, Anice, what’s that?’ cried Gwen, shivering and quaking, and—

‘Oh, Gwen, *I* don’t know,’ said Anice.

‘Shall we go back?’ said Anice in a whisper, when the noise stopped for a few minutes.

‘*Not* through the frog-pond,’ said Gwen, peering over her shoulder at the water.

‘Well, there isn’t any other way,’ said Anice, ‘so *I*’m going on’; and Gwen, her courage returning as the noise stopped, not daring to be left, had to follow her.

They had not gone far when the noise began again, rumbling and tumbling and echoing down the passage; and this time there was a curious squeak mixed up in it, which seemed to Gwen to make it much more dreadful than before; and it puzzled her to see the expression on

Anice's face suddenly change from fear to fun, as she burst into a chuckle of laughter, and began jumping about and waving the lantern up and down, waiting till the noise stopped again to be able to explain to Gwen—

‘It's all right, Gwen. I know what it is now. We're under the ironing-room! that has a wooden floor, you know, not stone like the laundry, and Mrs. Harris is turning the mangle—that's what makes the noise. I know it by the squeak that comes when the handle goes up. Now we'll creep along till we are close to where the mangle stands, and then I'll call to her to get us up. She said last time she never knew whether I should come at her from above or below, but we've done the “above,” so now we'll do the “below.”’

So they crept along, Gwen feeling very much comforted at the thought that they would now soon be safe above ground, away from frogs and horrid unknown noises, and with kind old Mrs. Harris once more, till they could see, through a large crack between the boards of the ironing-room floor, that they were close to the old-fashioned box-mangle; and then, waiting for a quiet moment, Anice suddenly shouted out—

‘Mrs. Harris! Mrs. Harris!’

‘Oh, Miss Anice! how you did make me jump!’ cried poor Mrs. Harris; ‘where are you now, I wonder?’

‘Mrs. Harris! Mrs. Harris!’ called Anice again,

'do get us up!' and then she took Gwen's shoes and threw them up at the boards of the floor above, and they heard Mrs. Harris gasp out—

'Well, if they aren't under the floor!'—and then as though a sudden thought struck her, she screamed out in a terrified voice—

'Miss Anice! don't move! don't *move*! hold tight! keep still! don't stir for your lives' sake till I come! There's the well down there, and where you are I can't tell, but you'll fall in—you'll fall in—and—oh dearie me!'—and they heard the pad pad of her feet as she hurried up and down over their heads; and presently there was a sound close to them which Anice knew well was the lifting of the well-lid, and the passage became much lighter.

And then the children heard Mrs. Harris's voice calling to them still to 'hold tight' and 'not to move,' but to 'tell her where they were.'

'We're close to you, Mrs. Harris,' said Anice, 'in the secret passage. I can see the way up, now it is light; it's the way the ancestors used to escape, so there are holes in the wall to climb up by'; and in a moment she was up beside poor Mrs. Harris, and throwing her arms round her neck.

Gwen didn't find it nearly so easy to get up as Anice had done, and Mrs. Harris had to drop a rope down to her, and tell her to fasten it round her waist, before she dared to try to climb up by the holes in the wall; and

when at last she reached the top, she found that she had left her shoes and stockings and the lantern behind in the passage.

‘Oh, I’ll fetch them,’ said Anice at once; but for a long time Mrs. Harris wouldn’t hear of it, till Anice pointed out that Gwen couldn’t go home without her shoes and stockings, neither could she get into any of hers, which would be much too small for her; and Jane would be so angry with Gwen for losing them too. And then Mrs. Harris had to give in; but she insisted on tying the rope round Anice’s waist first, in case she should slip, and in the end very nearly made her do so, by jerking the rope up tight just at the wrong moment, in her anxiety not to let the child ‘kill herself over an old pair of shoes and stockings and a lantern.’

Just before Gwen went home, Anice told her that the next day was Mrs. Harris’s birthday.

‘I don’t know how old she is, but I know it’s to-morrow, because I once found a card with “Many Happy Returns of August 3rd” on it,’ said Anice, ‘and I want to make a surprise for her. I’ll think of one to-night in bed. Mind you come directly after breakfast, Gwen.’

As Gwen went down the bit of road between the big gates and Jane’s house, she said to herself—

‘I hope—oh, I *hope* it won’t be a froggy surprise that Anice will think of!’

CHAPTER III

GWEN was a little late in starting out next morning, as the state of her overall, when she had returned the evening before, had been more than Jane could bear, and she had decided that it must be washed before it could be worn again, as there was no other one to change to.

She washed it overnight, but it could not be ironed till next day, and Gwen had to wait for it.

She found Anice waiting for her, sitting on the stone lion at the top of one of the gate-posts, and was greeted with—

‘You *are* late! I thought you were never coming.’ Then, when Anice had come down from her perch, Gwen asked her eagerly—

‘Have you thought of a surprise for Mrs. Harris, Anice?’

‘Well, I *have* thought of one,’ said Anice slowly, ‘but I don’t know if it will do. It’s not so exciting as yesterday, but, you see, Mrs. Harris wouldn’t care for that sort of thing, and I don’t know another secret passage either.’

‘It must be something that *she’d* like, as it’s *her* birthday, of course,’ said Gwen.

‘Well, I thought, suppose we invite her to tea, and have it out of doors on the terrace——? She can’t get in

to the summer-house, or we might have had it there; but we should have to get the tea and eatables from her, so it isn't exactly like *giving* it her——'

'Couldn't we buy a cake at the shop?' broke in Gwen.

'No,' said Anice rather shortly, and turned away, 'we couldn't. I've got no money. I've *never* had any.'

'Would — would a shilling do?' asked Gwen hesitatingly; 'I've got that much that father sent me when I couldn't go home for the holidays.'

'It might,' said Anice. 'How much do cakes cost?'

'Buns cost a penny each,' said Gwen; 'at least the penny ones do, but there are farthing ones and half-penny ones too. Cakes cost more than that, I think. It needn't be wedding-cake, I suppose?—I mean because she's *Mrs. Harris*.'

'I hadn't thought of that,' said Anice, puzzled for once. 'P'raps buns would be best, as you know how much they cost, and they don't ever have "wedding-buns," I think, like cake; so that will be all right. Now we'll write the invitation on some of the grand note-paper. I know where it is kept.'

Anice went to the kitchen and borrowed Mrs. Harris's pen and ink, and carried them up the secret staircase and into the library, which they found all in a mess as they had left it the day before.

'Hadn't we better put the books and things back in the chest, Anice?' said Gwen.

‘Oh, bother,’ said Anice, ‘I suppose, p’raps we had; I wish you hadn’t thought of it.’

So they packed the books, and the armour, and the sword back again into the chest as neatly as they could, and shut down the lid; but the trap-door they could not replace, as it had fallen into the hole and split in two pieces.

Gwen eyed the hole rather distrustfully, and wondered to herself how high frogs could jump; and when Anice sat down in her uncle’s chair at the writing-table, she sat *on* the table, with her legs tucked well under her, out of reach of possible frogs.

‘Now,’ said Anice, pen in hand, ‘how shall we begin?’

“‘Dear Mrs. Harris,’” suggested Gwen.

‘That’s how you begin just a letter,’ said Anice—‘*this* is a birthday invitation. I shall say, “Miss Anice Lea,” because I’m the eldest——’

‘But it’s my shilling that gets the buns,’ said Gwen, not to be outdone.

Anice took no notice of this remark, and went on writing in a large round hand on a thick piece of grey note-paper with a crest in silver at the top.

‘How do you spell Raeburn?’ she asked presently. Gwen spelt it for her, and Anice wrote on.

‘There now,’ she said, after what seemed to Gwen a very long time, ‘that’s a proper birthday invitation,’ and she handed the letter with a flourish to Gwen to read. This was what she had written—

‘Miss Anice Lea and Miss Gwen Raeburn request the pleasure of Mrs. Harris to tea on the terrace to-day, as it’s your birthday.

Tea to begin at four.’

‘Now we’ll put it in an envelope and then I’ll——’

‘You might let me take it to Mrs. Harris, Anice?’ said Gwen; ‘*you’ve* done all the writing and folding up.’

‘Here you are then,’ said Anice, handing the letter to Gwen.

Mrs. Harris was upstairs, putting away some sheets in the linen-room, when Gwen found her; and she was much surprised at receiving a letter, and turned it over this way and that, saying—

‘A note come for me? Who did you say brought it, my dear?’

‘I brought it, Mrs. Harris,’ said Gwen.

‘Oh,’ said Mrs. Harris, none the wiser; and laying it down, she said, ‘I’ll read it when I come down,’ and turned to go on with her work.

This did not suit Gwen at all, so she said—

‘But we’re waiting for an answer; please do open the letter now.’

‘Oh yes, you must, Mrs. Harris dear, please,’ said Anice, who could wait outside no longer; ‘we shan’t have time if you don’t.’

‘Oh, I *see*,’ said Mrs. Harris, as she looked at the

little girls' eager faces. And then the note was opened, and Mrs. Harris read it out loud, and exclaimed—

'My birthday! Is it indeed? and how did you find that out, my dears? Well, thank you kindly, I shall be proud to come; and I suppose I needn't write a note, need I, now you know I'm coming?'

The children had not expected a written answer, so they were quite satisfied; and Mrs. Harris told them she would be coming downstairs soon, and would then help them to carry out a table, and would give them a clean table-cloth, and show them what cups and saucers they might use.

'And then everything else we must do ourselves, please, Mrs. Harris,' Anice said.

Mrs. Harris then suggested that they should ask Jane to come in also; and, as this made a good excuse for them to go out into the road, they agreed at once, and set off first to Jane's house and made her promise to come, and then on to the shop to buy the buns.

'You can ask,' said Anice, 'as it's your shilling.'

'How many shall I get?' asked Gwen.

Anice stood gazing into the shop window, thinking deeply.

'There are four of us,' she said at last; 'we could easily begin with two of those penny buns each—that's eightpence; then a tea-cake that cuts into four—ninepence; and that leaves threepence for farthing buns. How many farthing buns can you get for threepence?'

—twenty-four, isn't it? I should *think* that would be enough, wouldn't it? It wouldn't look skinny, would it?'

'I shouldn't *think* it would,' said Gwen; 'and then there'd be the bread and butter, and the jam you have on Sundays, wouldn't there? Shall I go in now? You come with me, Anice; I'm sure I shall say it all wrong.'

When they got inside the shop Gwen first bumped against a chair, then knocked a biscuit off the counter on to the floor, and, stooping to pick it up, went very red in the face, and began slowly to say—

'We want some cakes—no, buns, I mean, for tea, please'; and when asked how many and what kind they would like, she quite forgot what they had settled, and said—

'Twenty-four tea-cakes and eight——'

'No, that's wrong, Gwen,' whispered Anice, nudging her; 'let me ask; *I* counted it up.'

So Gwen, feeling still more awkward and shy, stood aside for Anice to 'do the asking.'

'We want eight penny buns, one tea-cake, and twenty-four farthing buns for a shilling, please,' said Anice, feeling quite proud of her 'counting up.'

'Can't do it at the price, Miss,' said the shopman shortly.

'Haven't we counted right?' asked Anice, feeling rather small.

'Seven penny buns for sixpence, one penny tea-

cake, and twenty-two farthing buns you can have for a shilling, if that'll do you, Miss,' said the man.

'Oh, thank you,' said Anice, not understanding the calculation in the very least; 'that will do quite well.' Then she received the large bag of buns over the counter, and Gwen put down her shilling, and they hurried out of the shop, very glad that that uncomfortable business was over.

When they got back to the house, they hid their parcel just inside the door of the secret staircase, and then went to gather pink roses to decorate the table.

This, and carrying out the cups and saucers and plates and dishes, took them till dinner-time; and after dinner, as Mrs. Harris had promised to cut the bread and butter for them, and it was too early to begin to toast the tea-cake yet, Anice said—

'We'll go into some of the ancestor bedrooms that you haven't seen yet, Gwen, and I'll show you some things there.'

Then, when they had reached a beautiful old room with a four-poster bed in it, Anice suddenly said—

'Oh! I've just thought of a *real* surprise for Mrs. Harris! She had to know that she was coming to tea with us and Jane, of course, but she doesn't know who we are going to be! we'll dress up in the twins' dresses. They are in this drawer I know; won't it be lovely?—the twins in the picture in the gallery, I mean. They've got white gauze dresses on, long to the ground all



Anice soon found the dresses.

round ; and one has a pale blue scarf, and the other a pale pink one ; and their names are " Petronelle " and " Claribelle " ; and they have wreaths of pink roses in their hair.'

' Oh, what fun ! ' cried Gwen. ' I do love dressing-up ; let's begin now at once. Do get out the dresses, Anice. Which twin will you be ? '

' I must be the one with the pink scarf,' said Anice, ' because my hair's the curliest. That's Petronelle.'

Anice soon found the dresses, and some little white shoes and stockings that were laid by with them ; but before they tried them on they remembered to fetch up some pink roses from the garden, and some thread from Mrs. Harris's work-basket, to bind them together and make them into wreaths to wear on their heads.

After these were made—not without some difficulty owing to the thorns of the roses—the moment arrived for putting on the dresses.

The twins had evidently been exactly the same size, according to the dresses, so that Anice found that hers was a little too large for her, while Gwen's was so tight that they could only just make it meet, and Anice said—

' You mustn't eat many buns to-night, Gwen, or you'll burst the hooks off ! We'll keep some for lunch to-morrow.'

They each hooked up the other's dress behind, and put on each other's rose-wreath ; and then, just as they

stood together before the long glass to see the effect, the big clock struck half-past three, and they went carefully downstairs, holding up their white satin dresses out of the dust, and picking up the big bag of buns, which they had hidden at the foot of the stairs before dinner, to carry out to the tea-table.

Then, having carefully found out that Mrs. Harris had gone upstairs to change her dress, they filled the dishes with buns, toasted and buttered the tea-cake, made the tea, and carried it out to the tea-table on the terrace, and stood waiting for their guests to appear.

Punctually at four o'clock Mrs. Harris appeared round the corner of the house in her best black silk gown, and Jane came up the drive in hers.

Jane stared for a moment, and wondered whether she'd made a mistake and come to the wrong party, till she saw Mrs. Harris, and heard her exclaim—

‘ Well, to be sure, if I didn't think the picture had come alive and walked out of its frame in the gallery to come and have tea with us! This is a pretty birthday surprise, Miss Anice and Miss Gwen, my dears ’ ; and Jane said—

‘ That's how I like to see young ladies dressed ; clean and tidy, and pretty colours too.’

And then they sat down to tea ; and the little girls explained how they had bought the buns with Gwen's shilling, and hoped Mrs. Harris wouldn't think they'd been stingy, but it was all the money they had.

Anice poured out the tea, and Gwen handed the tea-cake and buns, etc.; and afterwards she said to Anice—

‘They didn’t eat much, Anice, though I think there was enough. *There is* a lot left.’

After tea Mrs. Harris would not let them ‘clear away’ for fear they should soil the picture dresses; so they sat one on each side of her, with Jane opposite, and she told them story after story about things that had happened at the old house before they were born, till at last Jane said she must take Miss Gwen home to bed; and while Anice and Gwen went up to change their dresses and put away their finery, Jane helped Mrs. Harris to clear away the birthday tea, which had been such a success; and Jane said—

‘You could have knocked me down with a feather when I first saw those children all dressed up. I thought I was dreaming.’

And Mrs. Harris said—

‘It’s the prettiest party I ever went to, Jane, and that’s true; though as to its being my birthday, I always was led to understand I was born at Christmas time. But, then, I’m getting on in years, and maybe I’ve muddled it up a bit.’

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Gwen met Anice at the gate on the morning after the tea-party, she said—

‘It’s a week to-day since I came! it *has* gone quickly. I thought it was going to be *so* horrid at first, but it’s been awfully nice since I found you.’

‘How much longer are you going to stay at Jane’s?’ asked Anice.

‘Another week, I suppose,’ said Gwen.

‘Oh, is *that* all?’ said Anice in a disappointed tone; ‘I thought you would stay at least all the summer. And there’s lots more to do; and it’s so dull all alone.’

‘P’raps mother would let you come to the sea with us,’ said Gwen; ‘I’ll ask her.’

‘Yes do, Gwen,’ said Anice, adding in a low voice, half to herself, ‘I’ve never seen the sea.’

Gwen exclaimed at that, and was rushing eagerly into a long description of the sea, and of the holidays she had spent at the seaside, when Anice cut her short—afraid of being looked down on for her ignorance—and broke in with—

‘Oh yes, but never mind all that. The thing is, what shall we do to-day? Shall we go in or stay out?’

‘I don’t know and I don’t care,’ said Gwen rather sulkily, for she did not like being shut up so shortly by

Anice the first time that something had turned up that she knew more about than Anice did.

Anice was taking little short runs backwards and forwards, and jumping over any little unevennesses or ruts that came in her way, and giving Gwen no chance of going on with her tale of the sea.

‘I’ll tell you what,’ said Anice, landing near to Gwen, after a jump over a straggling lavender-bush, ‘we’ll go and get Mrs. Harris to give us the key of Rosabelle’s room. She used to have lots of things of her own, but Mrs. Harris doesn’t know where they are; she says they were put away so carefully once, and she thinks no one knew where, after Rosabelle’s mother died. Come along.’

And Gwen, in her eagerness to see Rosabelle’s room, forgot her sulks, and ran after Anice towards the house.

They found Mrs. Harris in the kitchen, busy as usual, and Anice asked her to let them have the key of Rosabelle’s room.

Mrs. Harris hesitated at first, looking at the two eager little faces over the top of her spectacles; but she never could resist Anice’s coaxing for long, and so, shaking her head at her, she said with a smile—

‘Well then, Miss Anice, if I do let you have that key will you promise not to break anything, or get into any sort of mischief in *that* room? I don’t know what your uncle would say—I’m not sure as I’m right in letting you go there——’

‘We’ll promise faithfully not to get into any mischief, Mrs. Harris dear ; faithfully and *truly*,’ said Anice, jumping up and down, and dancing round and round Mrs. Harris.

‘And we’ll keep our promises too,’ chimed in Gwen ; ‘mother always lets us have things when we promise.’

So Mrs. Harris unlocked the drawer in the dresser, and taking out a great bunch of keys, she took one off the big ring and gave it to Anice, saying—

‘I hope I’m not going against your uncle’s wishes, my dear ; I do indeed, for——’

But Anice and Gwen did not wait to hear the end of her sentence, being too much afraid that she might change her mind and take back the key, and they were out of the kitchen, and flying down the stone passage to the great hall, before Mrs. Harris had had time to turn round and see which way they went ; and she could only gasp out—

‘Miss Anice ! Miss Anice !—Oh dear me, they’re off again ! they don’t give one a minute to say anything in. And there’s that nice bun-loaf—and two slices cut off as they could have had for their lunches. They’re too quick by half for me. I’d have to be ready overnight, as it were, to catch them with anything.’

By this time Anice and Gwen had raced into the hall, and up the secret staircase to the passage above ; and here they stopped for breath, feeling safe now from Mrs. Harris’s change of mind.

‘I’m not quite sure how you go to Rosabelle’s room,’ said Anice; ‘it’s not down the ancestor-nursery passage though, I know that, and it’s not beyond the great staircase either, so it *must* be this way’; and she started off down quite a new passage that Gwen had not been in before.

There were several doors down one side of this passage, but Anice passed them all till she came to one at the far end. This was not locked, and she pushed it open; and then she and Gwen went through it to a small landing which had three other doors opening on to it.

‘This is Rosabelle’s room, I think,’ said Anice, going up to the door most to the right, ‘because the leads are on this side, and she used to have her sofa out there and lie out of doors.’

Anice fitted the key in the lock and turned it, and after a moment or two she succeeded in opening the door; and then Gwen saw a long low room, white panelled from floor to ceiling, with two wide latticed windows, and a second door leading out on to the leads.

Under one of the windows stood the old couch on which Rosabelle used to lie, and by the side of it a low table.

There was very little other furniture in the room, and only one picture in a heavy gold frame, which hung in the middle of one of the walls, just above a low oak chest.

Gwen was disappointed at first at the bareness of the room, and she went up to the picture as being the only thing to look at in the room.

‘That’s Rosabelle and her mother,’ said Anice, ‘after she hurt her back; and she would always have her sofa put so that she could see that picture, and look at her mother’s face when she wasn’t in the room. I read about it in Uncle Andrew’s book.’

‘She’s even prettier here than in the one downstairs, I think,’ said Gwen. ‘Now let’s look for her things.’

‘There’s nowhere much to look,’ said Anice; ‘they’re not in the chest, nor under the sofa; and I’ve felt all about the panels, but I can’t find one that opens.’

‘Let’s have another good look all round, Anice,’ said Gwen.

So first they pressed their fingers all round every panel they could reach, and knocked on them with their knuckles to try for a hollow sound; and then Gwen mounted on to the oak chest and began testing the higher panels within her reach.

The top of the chest was highly polished and slippery, and, in trying to reach one of the panels, Gwen’s foot slipped and she fell against the corner of the heavy gold picture-frame, clutching at it with both hands to save herself; and whether it was merely her weight falling suddenly against it, or whether, unknowingly, she pressed on some hidden spring as she clutched at the

frame, Gwen never knew, but certain it is that at that moment the frame and picture swung inwards like a door—apparently into the wall—and disclosed a large cupboard like a small room, lined on two sides with shelves and drawers, and lighted by one small window.

‘Oh, Anice,’ cried Gwen, ‘are Rosabelle’s things in here, do you think? Come up and see.’

Anice was up beside Gwen in no time, and they stepped into the tiny room together.

On the shelves stood some china bowls and plates, and a whole set of toy tea-things, and a small dinner-set; and on a deep shelf, near the bottom, there was a small wooden cradle, beautifully carved, and a wooden doll lying in it.

‘What’s in the drawers?’ asked Gwen; ‘I hope they aren’t locked.’

‘It’s all right,’ said Anice; ‘here’s a key in this one.’ But the key was rusty and old, and wouldn’t turn either way, and they couldn’t open that drawer at all. However, the others were not fastened, and Anice pulled one open at once, and lifted a muslin cover which lay on the top, and then, before she could say more than ‘Dolls’ clo——’ she sneezed violently, five or six times running.

Then Gwen peered over her shoulder into the drawer, and she too began to sneeze.

At last Anice managed to get out—

‘Pepper—attishoo—pepper to keep the—attishoo—

moths away from—attishoo—attishoo—the dolls' flannels,' and she shut the drawer as quickly as she could.

The next drawer they opened very carefully, holding their handkerchiefs to their noses; but there were no flannels in this drawer, and not much pepper amongst the dainty little set of linen dolls' clothes that lay inside.

'Oh, Anice,' said Gwen, 'look at the lace on the petticoats! and what a darling little nightcap! and such weeny little pocky-hankies. Oh, and here's a dress made of the same pink stuff that Rosabelle's dress is made of in the picture downstairs—I'm sure it is, isn't it? and made in the same funny way, too.'

'So it is,' said Anice; 'but I *say*, Gwen, look what I've found!'

Gwen turned round, with the little pink brocade dress still in her hand, to look at Anice's find.

Anice had opened the smallest drawer at the other side of the little room, and Gwen saw that it was divided up into partitions like a number of little boxes of different sizes fastened together; and in each one was a necklace, or a brooch, or a bracelet, or some other piece of jewellery.

'Oh, Anice!' was all Gwen could say, as the former held up a string of tiny seed pearls in one hand, and a brooch with a miniature set in pearls in the other.

Then Gwen put back the little dress into its drawer, and both children spent a long happy time taking out

and looking at all the old brooches and bits of jewellery in the drawer, and trying them on each other.

Besides the string of seed pearls, there was a necklace of small round silver balls, and another of very pale pinkish cornelian beads strung on a fine gold chain ; and Gwen admired this one more than any of the others, and put it round her neck, wishing she had one like it.

Several of the drawers that the children opened afterwards were quite empty, but there was one in which they found some very old books with coloured pictures in them, and one in which there was a small gold thimble and a little pair of embroidery scissors, and an old, faded needle-book full of rusty needles. And lying in a drawer beside these was a sampler, only half finished, and the needle, with a bit of faded pink silk still in it, stuck in the middle of the word Rosabelle.

'She never finished it,' said Gwen slowly, holding the old sampler in her hand ; 'but the first part she did do beautifully, much better than we could.'

'Well, she had plenty of time lying on the sofa all day,' said Anice quickly ; and Gwen wondered to herself if she would have been able to do the work so beautifully even then, especially if she had had pain to bear most of the time as well.

'There,' said Anice, shutting the last drawer with a snap, 'we've seen all except the one with the key in it. I dare say it's only full of letters and dull things like that. Grown-ups always lock up that kind of thing. Oh dear,'

she went on, yawning and stretching herself, 'I'm so hungry. Hurrah! there's the dinner-bell. Come along, Gwen,' and she skipped out of the tiny room and on to the chest, and jumped down to the floor.

Gwen was following her, and pulling the heavy picture-door after her, when Anice called out—

'Don't shut it tight; you mightn't remember how you fell against it next time, and then we couldn't open it again p'raps.'

So Gwen left it just ajar, and Anice handed up to her the tongs from the hearth, to act as a wedge and prevent the little door from shutting by itself.

When they were just finishing dinner, a little later, the sun suddenly came out and shone straight on to Gwen, and Mrs. Harris, looking at her, exclaimed—

'Why, Miss Gwen, what a pretty necklace you have on to-day! That's new, isn't it? Let me look at it, my dear?'

Gwen flushed up hot all over, for she had forgotten to take off Rosabelle's cornelian chain; and Anice hastened to explain to Mrs. Harris how they had found the little room behind the picture in Rosabelle's room, and had looked at all the things in the drawers; but that they had not broken a single thing, or done any mischief at all; and had put everything back in its own place, except that one necklace, which they had forgotten.

Mrs. Harris took the chain in her hand and examined it, and then said—

'It's the very one as Miss Rosabelle is wearing

in her picture in the gallery ! Well, Mr. Andrew *will* be pleased to hear as it's found at last. I'll write to-night and tell him, my dears. Aye, and to think I so nearly didn't give you the key, Miss Anice ! "

'Oh, but you never *quite* say "No," Mrs. Harris dear, only sometimes nearly,' said Anice, giving her a great hug. 'Now do come up and see Rosabelle's little room, it's just lovely. And I *think* the chest is quite strong enough for you to stand on, so that you can get inside the little room ; and then you can tell Uncle Andrew all about it exactly.'

Mrs. Harris went up by the grand staircase, and Gwen and Anice for once went that way too, instead of going up their own little staircase, for they wanted to keep that a secret at present.

Mrs. Harris wrote that night to Anice's Uncle Andrew, and in the afternoon of the next day he arrived at the house, and Gwen and Anice were at the front door to meet him.

He was quite as excited as the children were, and raced up the big staircase after them, and along the passage to Rosabelle's room, 'almost as if he wasn't old at all,' as Gwen said afterwards to Anice ; and she answered—

'Yes, but he must be—must be—*quite* thirty, you know, though his hair isn't white yet.'

Then Anice opened the door of Rosabelle's room, and Gwen got on to the chest and pushed the picture-

door open, and Uncle Andrew and Anice followed her into the tiny room. Uncle Andrew could only just stand upright in it, and there was not much room to move with three people inside.

Anice showed Uncle Andrew the jewellery drawer, and the necklace that Gwen had forgotten to take off, and Gwen showed him the dolls' clothes. And then Anice, with a sign to Gwen, put her hand on the knob of the pepper drawer, and begged Uncle Andrew to come and look closely into it; but luckily for him he saw the roguish twinkle in her eyes, and said—

'After you, Anice, my dear!' and then gently but firmly he opened the drawer and helped *her* to 'look closely' into it—and she sneezed and sneezed and sneezed again, much to Uncle Andrew's amusement, and they all laughed heartily together. Then Gwen said—

'This drawer has a key in it, but we can't turn it, though we have tried, and we don't know what is inside the drawer. Can you do it?'

Uncle Andrew turned quickly towards it, and worked at the key for some time, and at last, with a dismal squeak, it turned in the lock and the drawer was opened.

'Just as I thought,' said Anice, 'nothing but dull papers.'

'Dull papers indeed!' exclaimed Uncle Andrew, turning them over quickly in his hands. 'I don't know

about that Anice. I think these are papers that we thought were lost for ever, and if so, it will mean that there will at last be money to keep the old house and garden as they should be kept; and money for you to go to school' (here Anice pulled a very long face), 'and to have a pony of your own' (here Anice's face cleared up again), 'and pocket-money like other little girls, and all sorts of things that you ought to have had before, and that I couldn't afford to get for you. Oh no, they are not by any means "dull" papers.' And Uncle Andrew looked so pleased and excited, and he shouted 'Hurrah! Hurrah!' and hurried down to the kitchen to tell Mrs. Harris what he had found; and she, to the children's amazement, nearly cried with delight, and exclaimed—

'Well to think of Miss Anice being the one to find the papers and to give you back your own fortune again, Mr. Andrew! and me so nearly keeping her back too!'

And Anice danced round and round her, crying out—

'Now you can never *never* say "No" to me again, Mrs. Harris dear, for fear I might be going to find a fortune for somebody or other!'

Then she suddenly stopped short and, looking at Gwen, said—

'Oh, but it was *Gwen* who fell against the picture-frame and found the tiny room!—it wasn't me at all. Uncle Andrew, it was all Gwen, not me!'

'But I shouldn't have *seen* the picture, even, if you

hadn't taken me to Rosabelle's room, Anice,' said Gwen.

'So then you are quits, children,' said Uncle Andrew, 'and to-morrow we'll go up to London and see the sights, and next week we'll have a picnic, or an excursion, every day till——'

'Till Gwen goes to the seaside,' said Anice, a little wistfully.

'No; till Anice comes with me to the seaside,' said Gwen.

On Gwen's birthday, which was in November, Uncle Andrew sent her a necklace of cornelian beads on a fine gold chain, exactly like the one in Rosabelle's tiny room, with a little note enclosed, telling her it was a present in remembrance of her lucky fall against the picture-frame, and the consequent finding of Rosabelle's things, and the valuable papers.

Gwen and Anice spent many happy days together at the 'big house' after Uncle Andrew came to live there, but they both thought that the happiest time of all was before the house was made 'fit to live in,' as Mrs. Harris said, and when the garden was like a peaceful wilderness, and they could go where they pleased and do as they pleased, and there was no one 'to tell them not to.'

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